

Bob's Imagination

Volume 1, Issue 2 April, 1993

Editor's Note:

Well, down to business. Spring break is over. Time to wipe the grass stains off the clothes and start waking up before noon. And what better way to deal with it than another installment of our magazine.

Had I known the first issue was going to be such a chore, I might have chosen to make this magazine a one shot deal. At one point, I thought we'd never see print.

But we did. Yeaaaaaah Bob!

I want to thank (and apologize to) all the people who contributed and waited for the magazine all that time. I know that some of my original guesses for publication were wrong, but my wonderful advisor just kept on saying, "One more submission, please?"

Anyway, we made it, and now it's time to begin the grueling process of working on the second issue.

Aurg!

I was really excited when we received our first letter, I almost burst. Our little old magazine generated enough interest to cause someone to write a letter. Wow! I want to share it with you:

TO: Bob's Imagination,

RE: Bob's Imagination #1

Dear Bob's Imagination,

Hello. At first when I received this magazine, I was kind of confused. I received it in the mail with no real explanation as to what it was, so I figured it was just junk mail.

However, as I was about to throw it out something caught my eye, and pretty soon I was completely wrapped up in the magazine and forgot completely about the state of the union. All I could think about was how good the art and stories were, and the new Economic plan just slipped my mind.

After I finished it I wasn't sure what to think. After all, Hillary hadn't seen it yet. But when she told me that she thought it was excellent, well, I just had to agree.

Anyway, I'd like to tell you all to keep up the good work. Send me the second issue when you print it. I'm sure that she'll... I'll like it.

Thank you.

Bill Clinton

President of the United States

On a more serious note, we did receive another, real letter to the editor. However, it is a little like a story, and I consider it a piece of writing. Therefore, you will find it in the table of contents.

One of our anonymous authors wrote a really good poem for this issue (in fact, it's the very first piece in this issue). The original of the poem came with a picture. However, the xerox machine does not allow to copy in color, and so we were left with a dilemma. We wanted to run the poem, but felt that the poem would lose something without the picture. After all, the picture was a visual interpretation of the poem itself.

Well, we pondered this for a while and came up with an idea. We left one page blank next to the poem, in the hopes that you, the reader, will provide us with the art. Just pull out your box of crayons (you do still have them?) and pencils, and go to it. Pour your emotions on the page. I'd be interested to see what people come up with.

Before everyone tells me I made a mistake, I'd like to try to clear something up real quick. At Cerrah's request, his story, The Miracle Child, had part eight reprinted in this issue with parts nine through twenty, because he felt that part eight would help cut down on the confusion if you liked his story but couldn't remember exactly what happened, and didn't want to dig out your already bronzed first issue of Bob's Imagination. It might be worth something someday.

I would also like to acknowledge the fact that, due to circumstances beyond our control, we were unable to print another installment of Josh Minter's Durghar, or the continuation of Quentin Hagewood's Fate Into The

Unknown. I want to apologize to all the people who were looking forward to those stories, and all I can say is that there really was nothing I could do about it. Hopefully, we can continue both of those stories in the third issue.

Well, leave it to me to forget to acknowledge the people who did the most important job that was done for me. I would like to give special thanks to Melissa Cooper, Lee Cooper, Marti Grisson, Mary Landers, and Mrs. Bridgens who helped edit and re-edit the spelling and grammar errors the computer didn't catch. Without them, well, the magazine would have had twice as many errors than were seen.

I'd also like to apologize for any mistakes made in the first issue. We do have a limited amount of time and a lot of material to coordinate, and it's only human to let a few mistakes slip by.

I'd like to quiet a rumor I heard in one of my classes before it starts to be known as fact. Myself, and my anonymous cohort, are in no way prejudiced against anybody in anyway, for obvious reasons.

This rumor started (I do believe) when a girl approached me and said, "The name of your magazine is pretty sexist." (Note: this is not the exact conversation, but a close representation of it.)

I was shocked. Sexist? "How so?" I replied.

"Well," she said, "Bob's Imagination. Bob is a male name. Obviously it's sexist."

Again, I was dumbfounded.

She continued. "Why don't you name it Barbara's Imagination instead. It's less sexist if you ask me."

In my mind, this struck me as bizarre. I mean, obviously the name is a joke, with no harm intended.

The point is, I believe the problem was not ours. We were using a fairly harmless title for our magazine. I mean, if you spell Bob backwards it's not sexist. And if you interpret it differently, Bob is a generic name for a person, and your imagination is your creativity. In other words, any given person's creativity.

Nowhere does it say we are sexist.

In my opinion, I think she, and not we, have the problem.

One last favor I'd like to ask any or all people in my audience. Since I have been a really nice editor to all of you, I'd like to point out that my birthday is April 30th, and that I accept any type of tangible present (tens and twenties preferably), and all gifts can be sent the same way submissions are.

Well, now it's time to start the second issue! (Party horns sound in the background.) In it we have a whole bunch of stuff guaranteed to make you think. Again, your letters are welcome (send them to me the same way you do your art). We still want submissions, so keeps sending. Anything that you can cope to give up to us is wanted. If what you're sending is too personal, pen names are acceptable (or, just submit it anonymously). We have yet to turn down anything.

Well, that about wraps it up for me this month. I've got a parting phrase for all you intelligent people out there: Run Far and Perspire.

On top of that, I'd like to turn the soapbox over to an old friend of mine who wrote another quote that I like, and as if that wasn't enough, my anonymous cohort would like to put in his two cents.

Until next time, this is Austin Rich, and I am outta here!

This issue is dedicated to Shalise, a certain waitress that served us mediocre coffee at an okay restaurant during a brainstorming session, and though she didn't seem to understand exactly what we were doing, she still served coffee with a smile.

Special Thanks To:

A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. for what they believe is a really rather peachy advertisement

The Bob's Imagination Staff:

Teresa Vessels and her action-packed Untitled novel

Rosanne Scott for her up-to-the-minute music (or video) reviews

Brandon Burkeen for his wealth of art and writing of art and writing that will cover the magazine even while he's back in town,

Mrs. Bridgens, that extremely over-worked and under-paid advisor in this venture

Other people that I probably didn't mention but are just as much part of the staff

And my cohort and co-editor in this venture, who still prefers to remain nameless (even if the staff has figured it out already).

“But i don’t want to go among mad people,” Alice remarked.

“Oh, you can’t help that,” said the cat. “We’re all mad here. I’m mad, you’re mad.”

“How do you know i’m mad?” said Alice.

“You must be,” said the cat, “or you wouldn’t have come here.”

Lewis Carrol

“Alice’s Adventures In Wonderland”

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Hello. It’s me, the somewhat omnivorous, brutally honest and often anonymous cohort. I’ve been asked to do a little piece for an editor’s note and I guess that that is what I am doing. A long time ago this Austin guy might have come to me with this idea for some kind of underground newspaper or magazine. I thought to myself, *self, this will never work*. Well, I guess the idea never did work.

Recently, this Austin guy came to me again and said, “Say _____, how would you like to co-edit this magazine of writing?” I said all sorts of affirmative phrases to him like, ‘sure, whatever you say Austin,’ and when this whole thing actually came to life I was quite amazed and found myself full of ideas.

Has anybody ever heard of Bob? A lot of people think that he is a pretty cool guy. This isn’t the Bob you see walking down the halls with girls swooning or gagging at him. He isn’t the guy with hair on top of his head. He is the older man you see driving a white van or occasionally a white Ram Charger at the intersection between Little Caesar’s and our local canteen of Big Gulps, bad hot dogs and the occasional nachos, 7-11. You might have noticed him nowhere else and you might have noticed no matter how many times he runs the light the officer, our local peace and justice, never pulls him over.

Bob is a bald guy in a tacky repairman’s grey oversuit.

Bob is a part of every one of us.

Bob holds the image of the ever-busy father-figure that has no children and shares the opinion that old males working on some little gadget should take the time to pull up their pants just a little. (‘Say NO to crack’, and all.)

Bob, when not the physical apparition, is the imagination in each of us. He is the part of our minds that stores data at the moments we say, ‘wouldn’t that be a neat story idea’.

This magazine is the product of many people’s Bob. It is Bob’s brainchild. Ultimately it is ‘Bob’s Imagination’.

Bob's Imagination

Contents:

My Soul's Self-Portrait on the Eve of Friday the 13th <i>by an anonymous author</i>	1
Blank Page For Scribbling	2
Portrait <i>by an anonymous artists</i>	3
The door <i>by Kelly Ballance</i>	4
Society and the dog-eat-dog philosophy as a tool to him most evil <i>by Cerrah Seal</i>	4
The Solution <i>by D. O'Dorant</i>	4
Déjà Vu: Again <i>by Austin Rich</i>	5
a.c.R.o.n.y.m. Advertisement	6
Walter The Dog Killer <i>by Aaron J. Danielson</i>	7
The Miracle Child: Parts eight through twenty <i>by Cerrah Seal</i>	9
Drawing <i>by Devin Miller</i>	10
Logan Bloodwind & Oren Tenge Drawing <i>by Brandon Burkeen</i>	13
Adrian Part I <i>by Austin Rich</i>	15
Portrait <i>by Rachel Szekely</i>	16
"Here Lies Hippy Man" Drawing <i>by Devin Miller</i>	20
No Escape <i>by Kelly Ballance</i>	21
The Messenger <i>by Brandon Burkeen</i>	21
Portrait <i>by an anonymous artist</i>	22
Drawing <i>by Brandon Burkeen</i>	25
Video Review - The Cure's "Just Like Heaven" <i>by Rosanne Scott</i>	26
The Window <i>by Becky Munsell</i>	26
Chapter II: Solitude <i>by Teresa Vessels</i>	27
Claw <i>by Teresa Vessels</i>	28
Monologue: To School <i>by Cerrah Seal</i>	30
Letter To The Editor <i>by Marti Grissom</i>	31
Portrait <i>by Rachel Szekely</i>	32
London: Fact or Fiction? <i>by Devin Miller</i>	33
When Men Go Buggy <i>by Austin Rich</i>	34
Ecstasy & Wolfgang Drawing <i>by Brandon Burkeen</i>	35
Baxter <i>by Becky Munsell</i>	37
Aarkyn Tyr Drawing <i>by Brandon Burkeen & Sid Burgdorf</i>	39
A Sequence Of Dreams <i>by Melissa Cooper</i>	41
I'm an ASSHOLE! <i>by James W. Anderson, Jr.</i>	42
Drawing <i>by Becky Erbes</i>	43
I wish <i>by Cerrah Seal</i>	44
The Deadline <i>by Kelly Ballance</i>	44
Stand <i>by Kelly Ballance</i>	44
Lost <i>by Ron Horner</i>	45
The abstract warm embrace <i>by Cerrah Seal</i>	46
He Was There <i>by E. Lavios</i>	46
Seeping <i>by Robb Wolfard and R. Stephen Howard</i>	46
The Rose <i>by Janice L. Kimbro</i>	47
The Adventures of Spare-O and Red Cardinal: Episode Two <i>by Buck and Austin Rich</i>	49
Thieving At Night <i>by Meredith Carlson</i>	49
Drawing <i>by Devin Miller</i>	51
Boy On The Curb: Chapter One <i>by Becky Erbes</i>	52
Editing <i>by Melissa Cooper, Lee Cooper, Jennifer Stump, Mrs. Bridgens, Marti Grissom, Mary Landers & Austin Rich</i>	
Cover Art <i>by Rachel Szekely</i>	
Cover Design and Art & Text Layouts <i>by Austin Rich</i>	

My Soul's Self-Portrait on the Eve of Friday the 13th

by an anonymous author

I wanted to draw you a picture,
To show you
Just how I feel,
Because my words get jumbled and tangled.
So, I took out a piece of paper,
White and blank,
Like our lives and relationships.
All clean and new,
Ready for us to inscribe upon.
I sat and stared at my colors.
"Love sees no colors,"
(An up-and-coming popular phrase.)
My love
Sees all colors and embraces them all.
How can all of everything
Be made of a few basic colors?
Instinctively, I reached
For black.
The void of color.
(I've disconnected my brain
And attached my pen to my soul)
Black lines
Spilled across the paper.
Dark thoughts
In a tangled web.
Things not to be shared with anyone.
Secret knowledge,
Unspoken words,
Things that come about
When light is extinguished.
Light blue circles followed.
Little spots
Of happy thought.
Big or small,
All significant.
But what is this?
They fade behind the black.
But even the harsh lines
Cannot pop my light blue
Bubbles of joy.
Canary yellow flies
In a wide arch across the page.
Singing
Of the light days
Gone by.
When the sun shone
And we were happy.
Golden days.
Snails and swirls sail.
Dark, deep, and rich.
Purple,
The color of longing.
Bold, but underspoken,
Talking to me.

Telling me
Of what could be.
Crossed
By rosey X'es.
"No," the World's outlook says,
"Not possible."
But nothing is coming up roses,
But X'es.
Shocking or not,
These cannot hide my little circles.
Scarlet red,
Of passion,
Has crept in.
Can you see it?
Or does it not appear
On a blind surface?
The Honor and Loyalty
Of blue
Defies this creeping color.
But.
Who am I to be faithful to?
Myself?
You?
Friendship?
Deep and clear,
The color of life
Defines it all.
Of growing up and new knowledge,
Green also creeps
Into the happiest thoughts and moments.
Have we expanded beyond our boundaries?
Or have we barely begun,
Not even seeing them?
Lavender and peach
Kiss us
With moments of life.
All hope is not lost.
We are simply in between storms.
My signature color,
Grey,
Spreads across.
Where does grey lie?
A color that is a cross between
Black,
Void of color and
White,
All colors.
Deep,
Yet light.
Be not mislead by the surface,
Keep exploring.
And color to surround you
And keep you safe,
I'll be here.



The door
by Kelly Ballance

Maybe it was sensitivity.
Maybe there was no point seen in these eyes.
Maybe there were questions that couldn't be asked.
Maybe there were no answers.
Maybe the answers were already known and not accepted.
Maybe it was the need for help.
Maybe it was the pride.
Maybe it was important.
Maybe it might have mattered once.
It isn't important now.
It doesn't matter anymore.
There is no question any longer.
Nothing runs in this mind.
There has been an end.
An end to this life for her.
I think she saw the forest through all the trees.
I think she saw the future.
I think she saw the world on her knees.
I think she saw it all at her door.
And
I think she was afraid to open it.

**Society and the dog-eat-dog philosophy
as a tool to him most evil**
by Cerrah Seal

recoil my sweet buttercup
join me in my race
all the world you must give up
to keep with my fast pace

I'm fighting for all the world you see
not all of it is good
the errors in our society
in lesser men find food

I'm the leader of resistance
I, preacher of the good
that needs to be this instant
before we're Satan's brood

He's watching over all of you
he's watching everyone
and out of once good hearts you spew
what makes this world go wrong

All it takes is sweet compassion
to cure the world that is
of all that leads to our oppression
Stand up and fight for this!
Stand up and fight for this!

The Solution
by D. O'Dorant

Still whistling, this time it was the theme from Rocky, the young man turned the corner and was promptly struck on the right front fender by another vehicle.

He got out of the car to examine the damage, as the other driver did the same. Uh oh, the other driver had a cut above his left eyebrow. Blood was streaming into his eyebrow.

Immediately after noticing this, the young man felt his gorge rise. Doubling over, he vomited on the ground. Blood was sick, so sick.

Finishing that, he got back into his car and, ignoring the words of the other driver, sped away after pulling away from the collision.

He still felt sick, but he knew he must not let this divert him from his task: to slay those at Psychopathing Murderers Unanimous. They ridiculed the fact that he couldn't, wouldn't stand for this humiliation. He was on his way to do something drastic to them with a chainsaw and a toaster.

Suddenly the car lurched to the right and ran off the road. He stopped and checked to see what had happened.

It was a blowout. Well, no problem. He could change the tire, which he did, and could continue on his way. Unfortunately, his car was mired in mud.

His temper rising, the youthful man spent an hour digging his car out. He still had enough time to use that bottle of Clorox that he'd bought on those as PMU. They'd pay.

His car, though a little worse for wear, was still drivable, so he continued on his way. Ten more miles to his first victim.

As (bad) luck would have it, a deer leaped out in front of his car. The man swerved to avoid it, but steered right into its path.

The young man saw the blood first, and ran out of his car, puking as he went. He had to get away from the blood. The vernal youth ran away into a nearby forest, his stomach knotted with the dry heaves.

Fifteen minutes later the youth sank to his knees and wept. Things weren't going his way. Everything went wrong, especially when he was driving, which was odd because he liked to drive. It was that damnable car of his, that was it. He had stolen it from one of his first victims and it had given him nothing but trouble.

Now he was angry at the makers of the car. He would hunt them down and carve their faces into... well, something. He hated them all.

Next time he would buy a Subaru. Thus filled with jubilation, he headed back towards civilization, humming a Wayne Newton song.

|-----|

Déjà Vu: Again

by Austin Rich

Hi. My name is Déjà Vu.

Hi. My name is Déjà Vu.

Sorry, force of habit.

You may know me. You may not. Either way, you have heard of me. Mysterious man who sells his skills to the highest bidder. Enshrouded with a mystic air. "Stay away from him. He brings nothing but trouble."

Those of you who may deal in, quote unquote, "dirty" business may have seen the little publication describing me to prospective clients:

Déjà Vu

Name: Unknown

Age: Unknown

Height/Weight: 5'10"/192 lbs.

Additional Information: Contact with Déjà is easy. Just give the word to someone whose heard of him. Word of mouth is his most powerful asset. Well versed in combat. Carries a staff everywhere. Additional weapons only when necessary. Carries some sort of talent with him. Can create effects of déjà vu. Origin of combat training and ability is unknown. Déjà's talents to be used at your own risk.

That's me. In a nutshell.

Or should I say, the nutshell itself.

All that mysterious outside stuff that is projected is merely a cover-up. Underneath that, I'm just a normal guy. Sort of.

My combat knowledge is easy to explain. I was trained, plain and simple.

In fact, everything about me, just about all the stuff I know and can do to aid me in my adventures was taught to me. Plain and simple.

I took a vow, however, to never reveal who the person who trained me is. Only a successor or ward can know that, or so I was told. I've only met two other people that were trained by her. One of them I love like my brother, cause he is. The other, well, let's just say I hate him like my brother, but he isn't.

Just so you don't get all curious and all, I've not seen my brother since we were trained. He never did finish his training, though. Hated the fact that he was being too much like me. The other guy, for some reason, I see almost too much. Want's to kill me, or some nonsense. Something about honor.

Never had problems with that you see. I always keep my word. Always. I sign a contract, make a deal, give my word, and you can sure as hell expect me to keep it. But you see, I got this thing with people who cross me. Don't like it much. They often end up hurt badly. Depending on the situation, they might end up dead.

F +

See Me
After Class!

Acro Nym
Period 3
Art Assignment

AN

IT'S

W.D.T.

W.D.T.

A

W.D.T.

ANYMORE

SUBMITTING
MESSAGING

LOLA

PAPER
BOXES

PLAID
SWEATER

*

Hey, I got no qualms with killing. Not any major ones anyway. See, I've always known that the way the rules are set are screwed, so I figure I'll just live by my own. Hey, I'm fairly reasonable if you just understand where I'm coming from. Some people are scum, and if they are, and I know they aren't going to be of much use to this world, well, fair's fair. Give the other guy a chance, I say.

But don't get me wrong. I don't just go and blindly kill anyone and everyone I want to. I've got to maintain the highest standards in this business you know. I kill under two conditions:

1. I signed a contract to off the guy and I find the job worth doing, or
2. I find the guy I'm killing someone I would have signed a contract to kill if someone had offered to make one.

Now I understand what you're thinking. You're saying, "He's an assassin!" with a hint of fear in your voice. No. I hate the word assassin. Sounds so unlikable. Sounds so unprofessional. Assassin. It just doesn't set well with me. I prefer the term mercenary. Because that's what I am, plain and simple. I do anything and everything that a person can get me to sign a contract to do. However, the toughest part is, getting me to want to do it.

About this talent before I lose your interest. If you want my opinion, it's a bunch of hocus pocus. The technical explanation has been given to me once or twice. "Being born a slightly above average child in the mental areas of life has unlocked a potential in you to influence people in a way similar to an illusion, in which the victim experiences a form of 'déjà vu' that is setup by the possessor of the talent. Furthermore, his body being in almost perfect physical condition has lent proof to the theory that he has some type of rare gene that allows him to be exceptional in the physical and mental abilities. Furthermore..." etc, etc, etc.

The way I see it, I was born with some weird ability, and now I can make people experience, "DÉJÀ VU." I kind of like the thing personally, but if you wanted to have it explained you're coming to the wrong guy. I've got it, and no one else does. Plain and simple.

But you're probably not really interested in this kind of stuff. If I know you, I know that you want to hear about the good stuff. The adventure, the excitement, the money and romance. Well, I get a lot of that. Why do you think I'm in this business, for my health?

But underneath all of those things there is another reason I do all of this stuff. One, plain and simple reason. Revenge.

Now, you know about me. And you probably know that, like you, I'm just a normal guy.

Plain and simple.

Now, about this government coup...

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Walter The Dog Killer

by Aaron J. Danielson

The sky grew dark with the on-coming storm. As the sky blackened you could feel the sharp crack of thunder and then the sudden burst of lightning. Then as if something had cut a hole in the sky, the rain came crashing down upon the tiny shack in the woods.

Walter sat in his tiny one room home (or at least that's what he liked to call it) but in reality it was just some wood thrown together trying to imitate a real home. Walter sat in the dim glow of a candle talking to his only friend, Chuck. Chuck wasn't your normal companion because Chuck was a dog. He wasn't a handsome or beautiful dog but a mutt. This wasn't the kind of dog you swerve to miss, but the kind of dog you don't think twice about before hitting it.

Walter and his dog lived a simple life, a life of solitude, because all they had was each other. Walter was very fond of the furry beast. That poor excuse for an animal went everywhere with Walter. They were never apart and always together side by side.

Walter wasn't your average person or at least he was until his life was ruined when he killed his mother four years ago. But two years through his prison term he had escaped. Now he wanted to put that part of his life behind him, but he was still plagued by these horrid dreams of his mother lying on the blood-stained carpet with her face beaten beyond recognition. These dreams sometimes made him laugh and other times scream in fright from the thought of what he had done.

As the storm raged on he kissed his trusting friend good night and unwillingly snuffed out the flickering candle, for he knew what his mind had in store for him; more evil visions of what he had done. As he lay there sleeping, the dreams began.

Chuck was sleeping on his blanket next to the dying fire. Suddenly a giant hand grabbed him by the neck and dangled him in the air. Then Chuck felt the other hand being placed on the top of his head, and as a flash of lightning burst into the tiny shack, Chuck stiffened at the sight of the twisted and malignant smile of his killer, Walter! Then with a sudden violent twist of Walter's hands Chuck was gone!

Walter began dismembering his trusting friend. As he ripped and tore at the flesh of Chuck, the blood clung to his hands like warm honey. Walter knelt there panting and laughing, the blood pounding in his head and the numb tingly feeling all over his body began to drive him crazy and he leaped from the floor. Screaming and howling, he threw open the door and stumbled into the storm. Hours later he returned home, discarded his clothes in the fire and huddled in his warm blankets.

Days later Walter was awakened by the sounds of birds singing and the bright morning sun pouring into his small home. Walter began to call for Chuck, but when Chuck never came, Walter hauled himself out of bed to find him. He began to scan the room, but quickly hid his face from the horrid sight of his only friend lying in a blackened pool of dried blood.

Walter placed the last sad gray stone on Chuck's grave. As he got up and walked toward his sad home, he stepped on a small half-chewed brown ball. It used to be Chuck's. Walter picked the ball up off the ground and began to cry. Walter felt so lost, so sad, but also very angry. His body was filled with hate. He had to find the person who had killed his dog. This person had to be brought to justice!

Walter gathered a few vital necessities for his hate-filled journey into the real world to find his dog's killer. Walter filled his satchel, put his overcoat on and slid his double-bladed ax into the wool lining, strapped the satchel on his back and set out into the world to find the sicko who killed his dog.

Walter spent weeks wandering through the woods, hunting down the killer of his friend. Then one night Walter stumbled onto a small camp of four people--a man, women, and two young boys--and at the boys' feet was a dog. At that instant Walter knew these people had to be questioned.

Meanwhile down in the camp of the Johnson's they were arguing about whose idea it was to rob the insurance agency. Michael, the father and leader of this small band of outlaws, sat staring at the calculators he had to steal because he had figured he couldn't rob the place and leave empty handed. He felt so stupid and he knew the world was laughing at him and how he had to hide in the woods out of embarrassment. While the family sat around the campfire roasting hotdogs, they joined together and sang a round of "We Are The World."

Walter waited by the tall dark tree with his double-bladed ax waiting for the family to go to sleep. Walter waited with hysterical anticipation until finally the last light went out. Walter threw himself from his hiding place and bound across the soft brown pine needles that lay on the ground below him as he ran dodging limbs and leaping over dead decaying trees that littered his path. Then he came to a dead stop at the edge of their camp.

Walter quietly walked around the small green tent, then violently sliced into the side of the tent with his ax. Walter plunged his hand deep into the tent and grabbed Michael by the neck and flung him into the dew covered weeds. He grabbed the other three and swiftly knocked them unconscious with the handle of his ax to end their panicked and horror filled screams. Walter then turned to Michael, and with a hate filled croak said, "You killed my dog, didn't you!?"

Michael had no idea what he was talking about. He didn't know what to say. His mind was a blur of thoughts. He couldn't get himself to say anything but, "Yeah whatever!?"

With that Walter grabbed Michael and tied him to a tree, and did the same with the rest of the family. Walter then turned to the dog. The dog just stood there growling and baring its shard-like teeth. Walter sinisterly licked his lips and gripped his ax firmly in his trembling sweaty hand and began to take a step towards the dog, but before he could react, the dog sank its ivory teeth into the flesh of his leg.

Walter could feel the blood running warm down his leg. He felt no pain, though, and no remorse for what he was about to do. He raised the ax high and brought it down powerfully on the back of the dog's neck. The blood from the dog splattered on his now blood-covered clothing. He pried the dog's clenched jaws off his leg and vowed to kill every dog that ever crossed his path.

It had been years since he first stumbled into the bustling town of Springfield. Walter had been living on the streets for many years now and he had killed over one hundred dogs with his blood-stained ax cleverly disguised

in his dingy brown overcoat. Walter was still filled with hate and an overwhelming sadness for his dog and his simple life in his simple shack in the vast wilderness.

Walter stumbled down the street that stormy night, hungry, cold and wet. Then he saw it; a dog, another dog to add to his list. As he stalked his prey into the alley, the rain fell heavy against Walter's body. Walter pulled the ax from his coat while he cornered the small black dog. Licking his lips he gave out a hideous laugh. Such a laugh would have scared the bravest of men. He raised his ax. Staring sinisterly into the big brown eyes of the dog, he dropped the ax right down on the center of the dog's head, but as the ax struck the dog's head, the thunder and lightning blasted through the narrow alley.

Then as if in another world Walter saw Chuck lying on the blanket next to the dying fire back home. Then he saw himself grabbing Chuck, snapping, ripping and destroying his only friend. Walter then realized what really had happened that night so many years ago.

Walter dropped his ax and began to run from the alley, stumbling into trashcans, spilling their contents throughout the alley. Walter would take a few steps and trip. He couldn't walk, let alone run, but he had to run. As he ran he couldn't hear the world around him, he wasn't aware, his body was numb, his ears pounded, his head throbbed, and it seemed to take a lifetime to reach the end of the alley. He crossed the street out of breath. Crying and confused, he tripped and crushed his head on the curb. Walter lay in the gutter. He could feel the blood running down his face and the cold water soaking through his clothing. Walter let out a whimper of despair, then death crawled across his body, kissed him good night, and left him to die in the cold, wet gutter.

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The Miracle Child

by: Cerrah Seal

Dedicated to Austin Rich in Emordiet

Part: the eighth

"I was kicked out of my house last year, Theo. I have been working at the cafe since well before then and I sleep at the house of an old lady I once cooked for. She has long since forgotten who I am yet still welcomes me to sleep in her spare room, every night.

"My mother, at the time she kicked me out, was afraid I would end up like my younger brother. She kicked me out and though I am sure she would accept me I am never going back there.

"I live happily with an old lady who doesn't remember who I am from day to day, I eat only what I can find extra at the cafe, and school meals, and I constantly fight the feelings that I too want to forget who I am.

"I hate who I am, Theo, and the only one who seems to care is you.

"And even you I sometimes do not see for days. I get sick during those times. I get so sick that I wish I could die all the more. You... you don't even know me and here I am pouring my heart out to you.

"Do you see these tears? Do you see them! They are the love I don't have."

"I do care for you, Bobbi. And I want you to know that all I have been able to think of for a long time is finding love. And finally you seem to be the one I'm supposed to find."

"Hold me," Bobbi said as she wiped her tears on my shirt.

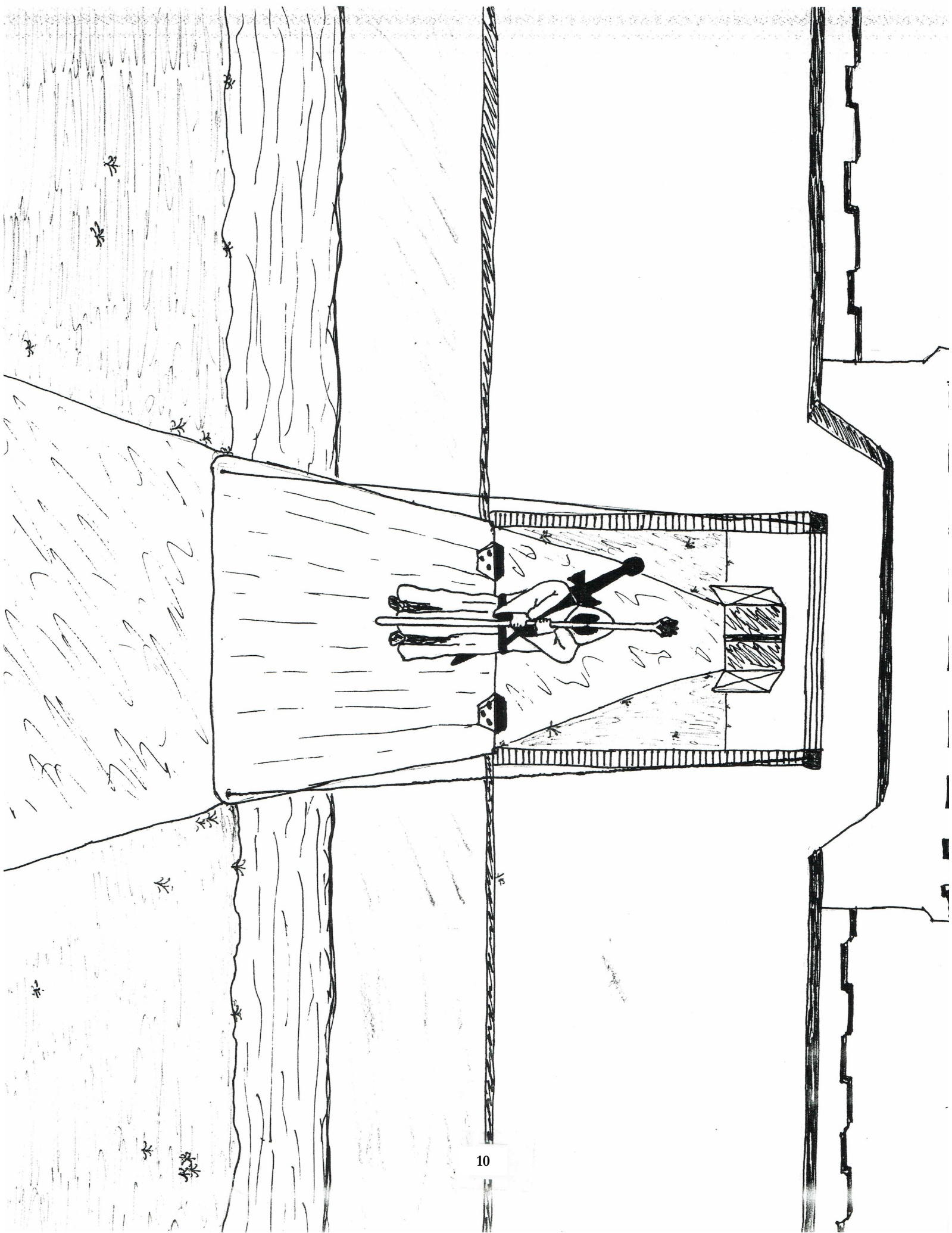
I held her long into the night, just sitting there. I didn't need to say anything. And when the city lights all seemed to dim I walked her home and then found my way to my own bed.

Part: the ninth **A dream**

I look at myself; I am a monster.

I see the semblance as I look into and upon myself to the monster that I surely must be.

I cannot take her; I cannot make her mine. I can't make her my girl because I am a monster and she hates me. She will fear me.



I am chasing after her. Her in a car. She is accelerating and I am chasing the car that she is in. I am disfigured and I know that she must fear me.

Then she turns on me. As her car faces me I see into her eyes. I see the anger that is surely there.

I see the headlights' glare. The brightness is in my eyes as I shut them. I just wait there. After what feels like a minute I open them to see the headlights but then I wake up.

I curse myself. I hate the dream. It was all a dream. A nightmare.

I cry because I cannot sleep. I cry because I know that, like in the dream, I cannot have her.

Part: the tenth

I awoke the next morning to the familiar sound of my mother's voice and I responded with terror as I scrambled to the bathroom to wash away the tears.

I attended school in a normal fashion and afterwards I visited the church.

This time there were people there and I stood awaiting the attention of the father currently attending a bothersome gossiping mother of four.

I became bored and began to think of my dream again. I concentrated. I wanted to know if she would have run over me in her car.

I replayed the dream in my mind vividly and I felt as if my hands were shaking ferociously. I replayed chasing her as the monster. I slowly went over the part where she turned around as well. Just as I was again to the part where she runs over me I open my eyes again.

"Holy shit!" I gasp.

I look down into the eyes of the father below me. I am floating in the air! I somehow descend in a slow manner before the eyes of my spectators and even before my weight was on the ground I had turned around and was sprinting out of the sanctuary.

Part: the eleventh

"Cody, why must you be sad?"

"I do not have to be, it is a choice. I don't know, it just seems like there is nothing better to feel. Everybody has problems right? Well I just keep mine bottled in. I am angry, Theo, and when I get angry I turn it in on myself. I will be happy.

"You know, your number one, a complete asshole. Why do you take the time to care about me, I guess you have a person you can love now?"

Part: the twelfth

"Thank goodness I found you Bobbi," I said as I approached her in the hallway.

"I wanted to know if you would like to do something. I mean together. I care about you a lot. I mean, you are the one thing in my day I have to look forward to and I would like to spend some time with you."

"You didn't have to say all of that, Theo. I would like to go on a date with you. I would like that very much."

That was earlier today and I fondly reminisce of her acceptance as I hold her in my arms right now.

I took her to the gazebo again and we walked around the park just east of the golf course. We found a secluded bench and as the sun went down we held one another and watched the cloudscape and the moon emerge from beneath one of them.

I held her against me and felt the warmth coming from her as my hands wrapped even tighter around her stomach.

"I am growing to love you, Bobbi. I don't know if that is supposed to happen but it has."

"I feel the same about you."

"I want to kiss you."

As I said this I began to regret saying it in the split second before she turned about and kissed me confidently on the lips. I impulsively began to kiss back and before long it was over and she settled back into the comfortable position against me.

I thought long and hard before the silence was finally broken by the sweet sound of her voice in the chilly night air.

“I’ve never kissed anyone before.”

I barely had time to assure her that I had never as well before she turned around and kissed me again.

“Come on,” she said as she pulled me to my feet. We walked for what seemed like seconds and I barely remember taking her home because of the bliss I was feeling.

Part: the thirteenth **A dream**

My disfigurement has changed. I see myself as a beast still but I am not quite as bad. I think maybe she won’t hate me.

She must. Why would she not?

There is the car again. Is it? Yes it is her car.

I run. Faster I run. I can almost reach it and she speeds up again. I run faster still and I cannot catch it.

I sigh. I will not catch her. She thinks that I am ugly. I will give up.

I slow to a jog and become oblivious to her. I close my eyes and come to a stop.

As I open them she is in front of me!

She opens her door and steps out. She looks at me and the time seems infinite. I can feel her gaze carefully checking every crevice in my cracked skin. She must now know that I am ugly.

To my surprise she takes a step toward me. I plea in my mind that she will come to me and she does not. She shrieks and I can hear it echo through my mind.

I fall to my knees in tears. My rage is overwhelming as I pour forth puddles of tears. I hide my eyes and curl up into a ball letting my own tears wet the sheets as I awake.

Part: the fourteenth

“Father Prescott I don’t want to make you forget. I want to tell you my problems, my dreams, my fears. I want to tell you what I am feeling. I want to believe that you can help.”

“I will gladly help you if you tell me your problem,” he says as I regret the fact I already made his mind forget.

Part: the fifteenth

“My father got me another car today, Bobbi.”

“I know.

“Theo. I think, no, I know that I love you.”

“I know, I love you too,” I said sitting in the cafe.

“Bobbi, I have been having dreams about you. I dreamt that I was a monster, and that I chased after you and never really caught you.”

“You have caught me, Theo. I love you.”

Bobbi leaned over the table and she kissed me softly on the lips and began to open her mouth. We kissed for a while slowly moving our tongues against the other’s.

I took her home after she got off work and for the first time she invited me inside. I entered with apprehension and nervousness as she led me to her room.

I commented on the decor and she stepped into me and we kissed for a long while. I felt her breasts against mine but didn’t reach up to stroke her softness.



LOGAN BLOODWIND

OREN TENGE

BRANDON
R. DUFFEL

We settled into her bed and slept comfortably in each other's arms. So happy to be together, not removing our clothes, but enjoying the embrace.

Part: the sixteenth **A dream**

I see her car long before I can reach her sight. I shield myself. I hide all of my wicked appearance. I do not look like a monster anymore.

I approach her car and as I do she steps out and looks at me. She cannot see who I really am. She comes to me. At last I don't have to chase her.

Part: the seventeenth

"Hey Cody, are you going to the assembly."

"Yeah. Guess what. Ya know Cynthia. She asked me out. I've been like sky high ever since. She just called me up on the phone and said 'do you want to go out or something'. It was great."

"I'm glad to see you happy Cody."

Cody and I found seats in the auditorium and I scanned the rows of people, looking for Bobbi.

People were beginning to settle into seats noisily as I stood and made my way up to the stage.

I vaulted to the top of the stage and as I faced the audience it began to get silent.

"Hello," I said, projecting my voice loudly towards the audience.

"My name is Theodore, Theodore Andrew. Some of you may know me. I have been screwing over all of you!!"

I started crying. The auditorium was now hauntingly silent as I began to speak again.

"None of you really know me. To you I am an anonymous face in the crowd. Just another person all the teachers resent having to teach. But really I am a beast. You should all fear me because I can control you."

The crowds' eyes widened as I willed myself to be in the air above the stage. I spotted Bobbi and I sank unto the stage once more.

"Among you is a person that I love. I slept with her. I will love her all my life."

Bobbi's sobbing became audible as she rose from a motionless crowd and ran from the auditorium. She didn't understand what people would think.

"FUCK!!!" I shouted. I heard the echo hundreds of times as I slowly sank to my knees and cried.

"I only wanted to show you who I really am."

Part: the eighteenth

Days went by and Bobbi was neither at school or Azul's. I searched for her and all the while I got little sleep.

Nearly a week after either of us attended school I found myself at the old lady's house. Without knocking I entered her house and found the room I had spent the best night of my life in.

On the floor was Bobbi, motionless except for the tears streaming down the side of her face.

"Theodore."

I sat on the floor and remained silent.

"A long time ago my brother killed my little sister. He never meant to do it. Bill never meant to hurt anyone. He said that he saw you do something the night you wrecked your car. He said that you were different and that I should stay away from you. He said all of that when I told him that I loved you. I haven't seen him since.

"My brother hurt ever since the day my sister died. I learned from him to build a wall around myself and not let anybody see the hurt inside.

"I opened myself up to you! I told you how I felt. And you used me. And then you told everyone about it. You're fucked up. You're different. I trusted you. You're a monster!!!"

Those words hurt more than anything ever had. I ran from her room and got in my car.

Every muscle in my body surged with destructive power. I no longer wanted to feel the pain.

Part: the nineteenth **A dream**

I am a monster again. I watch her car drive away. I find a box and I crawl into it. I watch from the inside as it is welded shut.

Part: the twentieth

My mum came in this morning. She tried to comfort me because she could see that I had been crying. I told her everything is alright and I gave her an unexpected apology for not being home much.

I told her that I missed her and as she left I could hear myself mutter, "I know that she will miss me."

I found the large hunting knife I kept in my closet and I sharpened it in solemn anticipation.

I told my mum I didn't want breakfast and I stared long and hard at that knife. I wondered if it was my solution.

I sat crying as I lifted the knife to my throat. I placed it against my jugular and in one last whimper I thrust it in.

Maybe Father Prescott will be praying for my soul.

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Adrian

by Austin Rich

Part I.

She wandered aimlessly through the street, with apparently no reason, as she did every day at 3:25 P.M. Today a man followed her for two blocks in the hopes of getting lucky, but when he quickened his pace to catch her, the switchblade knife fell from his hand and his body became limp, and lifeless, and collapsed upon itself. After she had trudged off through the rain, the local storekeeper called the police for the third time that month, and recalled the circumstances of the last two phone calls, and felt a sudden chill of déjà vu.

The storekeeper wondered what she could have done to them to cause them to fall uncontrollably to the ground like that. But every answer led to more questions, and each question gave more unsolvable mysteries. Why did she always walk down the street? Was she responsible for the unconscious men dropping like flies? And if so, how did she do it? Eventually the storekeeper gave up, deciding that any logical and rational answer would be more frightening anyway.

She strode into the supermarket, as she does everyday, and wandered the aisles until she found a bag of chocolate chip cookies and a Mickey Mouse magazine in her hands, at which time she turned around and stumbled back the way she had come in. One of the store clerks took his normal position at the door and awaited the \$3.73 she would produce and levitate toward his hand. His mind began to wander, and he remembered his first day on the job, way back when...

* * * * *

"...this is where the money goes. Just press this lever, and the drawer opens. Tens and twenties go here, fives go here, and ones go here. Anything bigger and or checks go under the tray, and the change goes in these slots in descending order, silver dollars and fifty-cent pieces in this one, quarters in the next, dimes here, nickels here, and lastly," pausing, to shift his two hundred and fifty six pounds to his other leg, and to soak whatever possible effect he could gain from the boring repetition, "the pennies go in here. Any questions?"

"Yes. Is this job always this boring?" inquired the new clerk.

"Actually," while chuckling softly, "after the preliminary training this job isn't that bad. The hours are good, the pay's okay, and you never know who might walk in that door," and, as if to emphasize his point, he pointed toward the door, and at the next customer. The customer strode into the supermarket, like she seemed to know



exactly where she was going, and wandered the aisles until she found a bag of chocolate chip cookies and a Mickey Mouse magazine in her hands, at which time she turned around and stumbled back the way she had come in.

The new clerk seemed compelled to walk toward her as she went toward the door, because it looked as if she really had no intention of paying whatsoever. He even found himself saying, "Can I help you?" When she didn't answer, he walked faster, and even said, "You haven't paid for that yet, have you?" She still didn't answer, and as he was about to reach out and grab her the manager finally voiced to the new clerk the word, "No!"

The new clerk turned to his manager, puzzled. He opened his mouth and was about to shape it in the form of the word, "Huh?" but he couldn't even manage that. His manager merely asked him to turn around. The new clerk turned, and to his astonishment, \$3.73 was just floating there, in the air, and in the background the woman was walking as if she never broke stride. The new clerk poked and prodded the money, and finally grabbed one to the pennies. When he released it, the penny fell to the floor. As the new clerk bent over to pick up the penny, his manager came over and grabbed the remaining money out of the air. He only said, "No, you never can tell." He walked away, into the backroom...

* * * * *

The clerk grabbed the money, and made his usual retort about how she would really have to teach him that trick with the floating money someday. She said nothing, as she always does, and the clerk proceeded to put the money into the register. As he counted it, he noticed that the money was a dime short. This really puzzled him.

"A dime short?" he said aloud.

"What?" said the neighboring clerk.

"Oh, **she** was a dime short today," he replied.

"A **dime** short?" the clerk shouted.

"Yeah, really weird, ain't it? I mean, she may be a little bit strange and all, and I still can't explain that levitation thing, but she's never short, not the least bit."

"Are you sure you counted correctly?" said the other clerk, almost in a panic.

"Yes, I counted and recounted and re-recounted. It's all there, except the dime."

"Maybe you dropped one?" he replied, knowing there was a logical explanation for this. There had to be.

"No, I would have heard or seen it."

"Well, then it has to be in the air," he said almost in confidence.

"In the air?" asked the first clerk, now in puzzlement.

"Yeah. You know how if you don't grab the money, it just keeps floating there?"

"Oh sure. Bobby and I waited all night long and not a bit of it fell until we, I mean he, touched it. I do believe I won money on that bet."

"Yeah, stop rubbing it in. Now, think about it. Maybe one of the dimes floated off course, and is still floating in the air, somewhere in the store."

"Of course, why didn't I think of that!" After thinking about what he said, he said, "Don't say it. But thanks, I'll search the store after we close."

As the clerks went back to their business, an ominous dime floated above them. It continued on its merry way until it hit the light fixtures on the ceiling, and plummeted to the checkout counter below. As Bobby picked up the dime that had hit his head, he noticed that there was a hole in the ceiling, near the light fixtures. Bobby, while cursing the rats, pocketed the money. Boy, would he have something to talk about at the next employee's meeting...

* * * * *

She meandered down the old road and passed many people as they tried to ignore her. Most parents warn their children about her, and tell them to be careful of her. But they rarely listen to their parents, and try to antagonize her and or get her attention in some way. Once, and only once mind you, a kid threw a ball at her to see how she would react. The adults saw the ball bounce off her, but the kids knew different. They saw what really happened, and they even tried to explain it to the adults. But the adults wouldn't listen, not to the noisy, annoying brats.

"Do you know what she did to Kenith's ball?" asked Cynthia.

"No, what?" asked Tommy, in great enthusiasm.

“Well, my parents don’t believe me, and neither do none of my friends, but,” turning, to see if anyone over twelve was listening, then in a whisper, “She’s a witch.”

“Are you serious?”

“Yes.”

“How do you know?” asked Tommy, now more enthusiastic about the situation.

“Well, when Kenith threw his ball at her, a little ghost girl came out of her,” and in an even quieter voice, “and grabbed the ball and threw it back.”

“Wow!” exclaimed Tommy, who couldn’t wait to tell his friends.

“Yes, but do you know what is even more scary?”

“What?” Suddenly, everything went silent.

In a very, very quiet voice, Cynthia said, “The little ghost girl was Sara.

“Sara?”

“Yes!”

“But Sara died of cancer. Don’t you remember? Her parents were sad for a long time, but they told us about it. They told us how serious it was, but that it wasn’t contagious. They told us all about it.” Tommy was now very worried, and very confused.

“Yes, but who do you think gave her cancer.”

Tommy could not believe this. “Wow!” was all he could manage.

“I’ve got to go now, but don’t tell no one you heard the story from me.”

He again was only able to whisper a “I won’t,” and ran home in the opposite direction, as fast as he could.

She turned and looked at the young children as they talked and ran, and for a moment, barely long enough to break stride, she reflected on her life. Her childhood. Her. There was nothing.

She realized how close the children’s story had been, and yet was embellished with time. She had not killed Sara. But there had been a person who caught the ball, a little ghost girl of herself when she was a child. Unfortunately, that’s all she knew. She continued again, and decided that after today, maybe she would be able to remember again. Maybe she could have her life back. Maybe things would be different afterwards. Maybe.

She proceeded down the block, and turned down a pathway that led to a house on a small hill, slightly away from the others. The yard and trees were perfectly kept, as was the house, at least on the outside. The only thing about the establishment that appeared wrong was the mail piling next to the box. Each day she would check the mail, and unless it was a bill, she would pile it next to her mailbox. This seemed odd to most people, seeing how she never breaks stride to do it. In her usual, mysterious way the bills would float behind her, and the rest of the mail would just pile up.

Except on Sunday. Sunday was the one day that she didn’t go out. Not that there was anything really special about Sunday, it was merely an arbitrarily picked day to stay home. Occasionally on Sunday you’ll see her walk around the house, and any inconsistencies would be fixed. The hedge was normally cut, as was the grass. Any foreign objects that didn’t belong were also taken care of. And of course, the mail was burned.

Some weeks, very little mail would pile up, and her weekly extravaganza was not that interesting. But occasionally, people would check her mail Saturday night to see how much mail was there, and to see if they should leave Sunday evening open for the display.

She would start by, in her special way, lifting the pile of mail and placing it in the center of her yard. She would then stand behind the pile and would look up across her yard to the houses on the other side, like an orchestra conductor. The people watching this would try to look inconspicuous by watering the lawn or cleaning the yard. But when she started the blaze, they were almost drawn to what she does.

She would then lift and ignite a single piece of mail. As it burns completely, the flames would dance in their mystical way, and die down again. Then she would ignite three or four more letters, each in strategic places in the pile, and would continue to light them one at a time, until there was one, big, continuous flame. It would dance more mystically than the first, and would illuminate her and her house, and highlight parts of her face that would otherwise be hidden, and unnoticeable. The adults would watch, and would see the reds, oranges, yellows, and other such colors that a flame makes. The adults were just... drawn to these flames. They didn’t know why, maybe it is some kind of childish desire they have retained over the years. If only they knew how true that was.

The kids would see something different. When she lights her mail into a beautiful conflagration, the children notice the magical side of the flames. They see the dancing and the things it’s light can do to people. They see the

wondrous illuminations and the deepness of the colors. They see the fire people. They see the faces in the flames that make the fire dance. They see the illuminations and the various colors. They see pure... magic...

She was still walking down the path, her mail following her. As she approached the door of the house, it unlocked and let her in. When she was completely through the porthole, the door closed behind her, and locked. Even though it was late in the afternoon, her day was just beginning.

* * * * *

She entered the kitchen. The kitchen was not that different from a normal kitchen, with the exception that there was almost nothing in it, like most of the house. The rooms had no decoration in them, and with the exception of her room and the kitchen, which had a table, a chair, and a refrigerator, there was little else in the house. She placed the cookies and magazine on the table, and proceeded to get a glass of milk from the refrigerator. As the gallon jug tipped over and poured out the remaining contents, she made a mental note to add \$1.90 to the money she would have to pay tomorrow. She discarded the jug, sat down in the chair, ate the cookies and drank the milk.

She left the kitchen. After she had eaten the cookies, she had no more business there. As she stood up, and left, the light through the window made her full garb visible on the darkened, melancholy day. She wore dark boots that were consistently one color with the exception of the brown mud stains around the edges. Her pants were pulled over her boots, and were also dark colored, but not quite the same shade as the boots. The pants made her look very slender, and proceeded all the way up to her waist where, in yet another shade of dark, a t-shirt was tucked into her pants. Wrapped around her arms and neck, that also fell to her waist where her studded belt was set, was a multi-colored, and yet dreary looking, shawl. She was a very pretty woman of about twenty.

She entered the hallway in the house and walked a ways until she stopped and turned, and was facing a stairway. She climbed the stairway to the top, and turned down another hallway to the door at the end. She stood in front of it for a moment. She knew that upon entering the door, there was always a chance that today would be the last day. That maybe, just maybe she could go back to what she used to be. With a cautious sigh she opened the door.

As the door closed behind her, she saw again what her room looked like, knowing that at one time it was different, and that it had been her's when it was. She didn't know how she knew this. There were many things she did not know. She glanced at her room again. The wallpaper was all different colors, mostly dark ones, and took on the resemblance of paisley. Along the walls were many old and tattered rags that hung looming over the floor. A curtained window stood in front, and to the left of her, and a small beam of dull sunlight passed through the air and onto the right corner of the room, next to the door. A small washrag sat there, and perked up as she entered. Opposite the window, on the floor sat a mattress, perfectly made into a bed and ready to sleep in. On the wall, directly in front of the door hung the only picture in the house, a small photograph of an older woman in her early forties, and a young girl about nine. And in the right corner of the room a large pile of washrags sat, waiting.

She stood there for a while, pondering the imponderable, and proceeded to sit on the bed and read the Mickey Mouse magazine. She loved the pictures and the simple-minded jokes the children so much love. She wondered about herself and her childhood again. She put the magazine in a box under the window, with the rest of the magazines. She really didn't have many. She only got the magazines once in a while. But there was something about Mickey that she was drawn to. She could tell that the washrags were getting restless. She leaned back against the wall and she, too, waited.

The washrag pile slowly became active, and they began to move toward her, slowly. There were all kinds of rags, and each seemed to be more and or less older than the others—"each one different. But one washrag seemed to be the leader. This one was not square like most washrags, but it was a quadrilateral. It was wrinkled with age as if it hadn't been washed or ironed in quite a while. The edges were ripped and tattered with use, and there was a hole here and there, getting bigger as the months went by. There were pieces of thread emanating from several places on the rag. It had the occasional stain as well, paint here, mustard here, blood there. This rag was not nearly as old as some of the other rags in the "pack," but when it was looked at, one could tell that he was the leader. The "pack" crawled onto her as she sat on the bed, and slowly covered her entire body. Her face was still uncovered, as well as the rest of her head, and her brown hair that fell past her young face and to her neck. She was ready, more than normally for some reason. Maybe that was a sign that this might all be over...

To Be Continued...



HERE LIES
Hippy Man
RIP

No Escape

by Kelly Ballance

The boy turns off the cascading water. The bathroom windows and mirrors are steamed, so when he glances into them he sees only the faintest shimmer of his tired face. The fixtures are covered with droplets of very heated moisture. He silently signs his name with a flourish to his final written comment of the world corrupt. He turns on the heater, steps out of the bathroom with his note in hand and shuts the bathroom door. He quickly checks all the drapes and locks throughout the house. He sees everything just the way he likes it and then places his note on the front table.

When it will finally be noticed, he could never guess, but he places it there anyway. He traces his steps back to the bathroom and on the way there, he grabs a pop from the kitchen. He completes the final steps and places his hand on the knob. What will happen behind this door will give others nightmares for months, but he no longer cares.

He questions himself yet again. Does he really want to do this? He gives himself no verbal answer, but opens the door, steps in, and carefully shuts and locks it after him. He is starting to feel the effects of the soda. Already the sugar is coursing through his body.

“Hey. Wadda ya know, I guess I went and forgot I was a diabetic,” he giggles furiously. Somewhere deep inside him a voice is crying out for him to stop this nonsense right away. He realizes it’s his father’s voice and he tells his dad, his good ole pa, where he can shove his advice. He puts his empty can of soda on the counter and places himself, jeans and all, into the already overflowing tub. He turns the hot water back on full force and watches the water spill up over the side and plummet to the tiles below. They seem so far away now.

He silently takes the razor in hand and caresses the insides of his wrists, then gouges a wound all the way up to his elbow. The blood wells up from the deep laceration. He does the same to the remaining arm, and his life’s blood flows out of him. He watches the water turn a Kool-Aid pink and from a distance he watches himself lean his head (a head that seems to weigh a million pounds) back and slip into the eternal sleep of death, where the horrors of the world and his father will haunt him no more.

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The Messenger

by Brandon Burkeen

Morgan Fulton awoke to the sound of impatient pounding at the door of his cabin. As he rose to open it, he realized that it was well after dusk, and not long before dawn. He opened the door and to his great astonishment, there stood a Confederate soldier, near dead from exhaustion and covered from head to toe in dirt and blood. And as if that weren’t enough, from the way he stood, he appeared to have a broken leg.

Without a word, the soldier limped through the doorway and collapsed onto the meager wooden bench that Morgan used for his woodworking. This effort seemed to be excruciatingly painful to the soldier, for the sounds he made were similar to those usually associated with breaking branches. Struggling to sit upright, the soldier muttered a few unintelligible curses, then, realizing the effort was pointless, sank into his previous position and began to speak.

“The Union,” he began, between coughs that produced blood and determined deep breaths, “has planned an attack on,” more wheezing and heavy breathing, “Fort Crumlie and the villages surrounding... it.”

At this point the soldier’s head lay back and his eyes closed, and momentarily his breathing ceased, but the next instant he seemed to have regained his determination to relate his tale.

“I... was sent to... warn the Fort... and... villages... but... was ambushed... by... Union... soldiers. They... shot my horse... horse fell on... me, busted... leg... I ran... they shot me... then I... came upon trail... to your... cabin... Must warn... General McClaine... about... attack.”

After that explanation which seemed to require more strength than Morgan had known any man could ever possess, the soldier passed out and fell onto the floor.

Morgan made the decision to finish the mission almost as suddenly as the Union soldier came bursting through the door.

Seeing the unconscious Confederate laying there--defenseless on the ground, the Union soldier shoved Morgan against the wall with the butt of his rifle, and with his bayonet, slashed downward toward the base of the Confederate's skull. But at the last possible second, the Confederate rolled out of the way and almost in the same instant brought the bayonet on the end of his rifle firmly into his opponent's groin, drawing a goodly amount of blood which ran freely down his legs and onto the floor.

A few moments later, three more Union soldiers appeared in the doorway of the cabin and as one tried vainly to save his incapacitated companion, the other two attacked Morgan and the Confederate.

Before the Union soldier could even take two steps in his direction, the Confederate had put a lead pellet in his skull. This man collapsed immediately, losing nearly as much blood as the first man had, but less painfully.

Seeing what had just happened to his two companions, the Union soldier left his friend, drew his sword, and beheaded the Confederate.

Meanwhile, Morgan had been in a battle with the third Union soldier, in which swords were being used and Morgan was getting the worst of it. But, as Morgan was being backed against the table by the soldier's superior swordsmanship, his left hand rubbed against the lantern and he came upon a splendid idea. With all the strength he could muster, Morgan clutched the lantern and hurled it at the soldier. The soldier looked extremely frightened as the lantern shattered on his chest and his uniform burst into flames. He dropped to his knees as his flesh started to burn and, unfortunately, came too close to the wall, setting the cabin ablaze.

As the Union soldier rose from killing the Confederate, he turned to see orange flames licking at the ceiling and a steel blade slashing through the air at his belly. He had no time to parry it so the only thing he could do was to clutch at his intestines and pray that it would end soon. It did.

No sooner had Morgan stepped out of the cabin than the supporting beams of the roof collapsed, stifling the soldier's hysterical screams of pain and anguish forever.

He sprinted to the stalls as fast as his legs would carry him and prepared his best horse for the treacherous ride ahead. It was only twenty miles by the route he was planning on, but they were mostly uphill and through every type of landscape imaginable.

Morgan mounted up, goading the horse to a dead run, past the spot where the Confederate had been ambushed, drawing no fire, and past the crossroads where there was--still hanging from the gallows--the corpse of a slave that killed his master.

Morgan frowned as he passed this corpse, for although he believed that slaves weren't a bad thing, he also believed that they were deserving of rights just like everyone else. Besides, he had heard the story behind this man. His master had whipped his wife and three children to death, so one day when he was to be whipped, he attacked the master, breaking every bone in his body before killing him by slitting his throat.

"You can hardly blame him," thought Morgan as he rode on.

As he reached City Hall of Manton, the sun was only an hour from rising and there was no one in the streets. Morgan dismounted, then marched into the mayor's office. By some strange twist of fate, the mayor was in his office.

"The Union troops are preparing to attack Fort Crumlie soon. They are marching on it at this very moment. So tell the townspeople to be prepared to defend themselves. I'll be off to tell the other towns now, so if you don't mind..." said Morgan in as urgent yet polite way as possible.

"Now wait just a minute young man," interjected the mayor, "you'll need a fresh horse, you'll need water. And you don't have time to warn every town, so I'll send a messenger. You ride your hardest to Fort Crumlie, because if it is taken with the troops in it, we've lost the war."

"You'll find a fresh horse in the stables across the street. Take whichever one you think the best."

"Thank you, Mayor," was all Morgan could think of to respond.

He left City Hall and crossed the street to the stables. He picked a strong mare and mounted up, then rode away at top speed from the town.

"Now that I don't have to stop at every little town," he thought to himself, "I can take a more direct route."

"That means I only have five miles left to go before I'll be in sight of it."

With this renewed zeal, he urged the mare to even greater speed until, passing through a small patch of forest, he heard a musket shot out of the brush and felt the red hot projectile pierce the flesh of his left arm, nearly jarring him out of his saddle. But without slowing his pace, he kept on.



He could hear the hoof beats of his pursuer's mounts closing the distance between them gradually, and he knew that if his mare slowed, he was as good as dead. Still running frantically through the forest, Morgan's horse passed right by a side road that he knew went maybe fifty yards and then ended at a ravine that was hard to ride down, but he knew it could be done from previous experience.

Instead of taking this path he went straight ahead, hoping to outrun the pursuers. As he went further he began to see something in the road ahead. As he neared it, he realized it was a group of Union soldiers on horses. And they had seen him.

Seeing them draw their swords and not wanting to lose his, Morgan leaned out of the saddle and snatched up the saddle bag. Tossing aside the bag, he wrapped the strap around his hand with the buckle hanging free.

Approaching the two riders, Morgan twirled the buckle above his head and brought it down firmly on the leading soldier's wrist, disarming him and knocking him out of the saddle.

Struggling to stay in his own seat, Morgan spun his horse around to meet the second soldier's charge.

As the soldier swung with his cutlass at him, Morgan fell out of the saddle, and the sword slashed through his horse's left flank, bringing frantic fear into its eyes. It reared back and hammered its hooves into the soldier's chest and head, halting his pained screams before they could clear his throat.

Morgan narrowly avoided the pounding hooves of the two horses by rolling out of the way, then springing to his feet and clutching the reins of the first soldier's horse. He mounted up, then urged the horse back towards the ravine he had passed before.

He pulled the reins at the last possible instant, just in time to keep the horse's forward momentum from hurling them both over the lip of the precipice and into the chasm below. He dismounted and as he did, saw the Union troop was at the beginning of the side road he was on.

"Halt!" came the cry from General Attelby as he saw the mount's hind legs charging over the cliff and away from him.

"The fool got himself killed. Now we can continue our march without interruption."

"Yes, sir," was the reply from his sergeant.

After seeing if they could help their wounded comrade, the soldiers rode off, unknowingly leaving Morgan safe in his perch above the road in an oak tree.

He climbed down from the old weathered tree, and sprinted for a farmhouse he had seen just before coming upon the Union troops. No one answered his knocks, so he decided to 'borrow' a horse, figuring it was all right because, after all, this was government business.

Morgan had to take a different route than he had planned, and realized this would take an extra half an hour than he had been hoping for.

Once in sight of Lantine, Morgan could see an encampment of Union soldiers surrounding the small town. Having this knowledge in mind, he dug his heels into the horse's ribs until his legs ached from the effort. At this urging, the mare took off like it had its tail on fire.

It tore through the tents, evoking cries of shock and rage from their tenants, but before any could take action, the mare was already through the camp and beyond.

But before she could get 100 yards, possibly 20 men on horseback were pursuing them, hollering cries of savage anger.

Morgan realized with great agitation that the soldiers were still pursuing him after nearly an hour and showed no signs of letting up, when, on the horizon, he suddenly saw Fort Crumlie. With renewed enthusiasm, he leaned forward, urging the horse with every ounce of his being, urging it to run, to, and past, its limits. It did, for little more than half a mile, but, about 300 yards from the fort, lunged forward, coughing up blood through its mouth and nostrils, and hurled Morgan to the ground as it, too, fell.

Springing to his feet almost instantly, Morgan whirled to face the oncoming charge of the ten soldiers that had kept up with him, then drew his rifle. He downed two men in the amount of time he had to fire, then ran for a rock embankment not much more than thirty feet away. Before reaching it however, he heard hoof beats closing in on him. He kept running until he heard the sound of a sword being drawn and at the last instant ducked under the soldier's near-death blow.

Almost at once, Morgan was on his feet again, ready to thwart the soldier's next onslaught. While the soldier's horse thundered toward him, Morgan drew his sword, and as the soldier sliced through the air at him, parried the blow, producing a shower of sparks which frightened the horse into coming close to toppling. The

horse recovered, but the rider was not so lucky. The sudden sidestep by the horse was too much for him to keep seated, and he fell to the ground, being trampled by his mount's terrified stamping.

The trampled mass of broken bones and bleeding flesh was too much for Morgan's stomach to bear, so he continued his sprint for the rock bank. Just as he reached it, the five remaining soldiers were planning their final offense against him. This gave him time to plan out his strategy and load his two rifles. "There being only one way up this embankment," he thought aloud. "That's where I'll have to defend against. They can only come up one at a time, so that's a point in my favor, and if I'm lucky, I'll only have to fight with two, because the other I can use the guns on."

As the first soldier came up the short path to the top of the bank, Morgan took aim and fired. He missed. For some reason unbeknownst to Morgan, the soldier had stopped walking just before he fired, so instead of the bullet puncturing his skull, it just grazed from his temple to a few inches behind his ear, leaving a wide path of blood running down the side of his head.

For a moment Morgan considered doing the man in with his sword, but then thought better of it because the soldiers would have time to come up. So instead he shot again with the other rifle. This time though, the projectile took its mark. It hit the soldier directly in the chest, knocking him against the rocks strewn along the side of the trail, and leaving a hole the size of a silver dollar in his ribs, from which blood flowed freely onto the dusty ground. This is where the man expired.

A few moments later, a second man started to ascend the trail. Morgan drew his pistol, aimed, and fired, hitting the man directly in the thigh. But the soldier didn't let this seemingly major injury deter him. He kept right on up the trail.

Reaching the top, the man's head and shoulders came into the light, and Morgan could see that he was a sergeant from his stripes. He could also see the patch over his left eye, and unfortunately, the pistol he drew from the sash around his chest.

The sergeant leveled the pistol and fired. The shot echoed and rang in Morgan's ears like the burning pain that throbbed through his entire upper body. Looking down to see where he had been hit, he realized the bullet had penetrated his flesh directly below his left collarbone and exited through his shoulder blade. Blood was soaking his clothes, both front and back, but he drew his sword, and moved to face the sergeant.

This opponent was no swordsman, the sergeant quickly found, but he did have extremely good instincts for the skill, and that made him hard to defeat. Nonetheless, the sergeant easily maneuvered Morgan into a position from which he would assuredly fall into a cleft. He did. Seeing Morgan lying there, for the most part defenseless, the sergeant raised his sword above his head to deliver the death blow. This was a mistake. For as he did this, Morgan held his sword vertical, and kicked the sergeant's feet out from under him. This caused the sergeant to fall forward onto Morgan and his awaiting sword.

Morgan freed his sword from the sergeant's limp and battered body, sheathed it, then sprinted for the fort, knowing that the remaining soldiers would be right after him.

He ran through the gates, approached a stranger and said, "I have a message for General McClaine. Where can I find him?"

The stranger smirked and replied, "In the southeast corner of the fort. Just past the ammunition shed."

Morgan ran as fast as he could to the southeast corner of the fort and as he went around the corner of the ammunition shed, halted, dead in his tracks. His heart momentarily stopped, and when it started again pumped only ice cold blood.

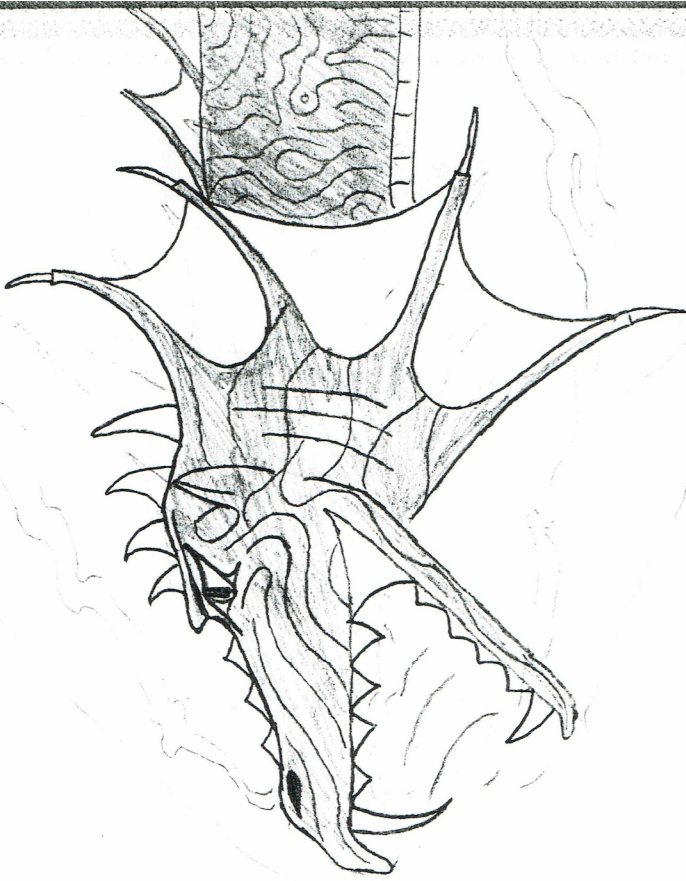
For the only thing in the southeast corner of the fort was a row of gallows, and hanging from a noose on each, was an officer of the Confederate Army. The one in the center was General McClaine.

The only thought in his mind was to run. Spinning around, Morgan did run... directly into the sergeant he had confronted on the bank.

"Your mission was hopeless," came the words from the sergeant, each one a scalding insult. "The soldiers were gone before our troops arrived. The only remaining non-civilians were these officers you see so hideously murdered. We captured the fort two days ago, so you see, as I said before, there was no hope."

Morgan was stunned. He should have thought of it before. Of course the fort was already captured, otherwise there would not have been Union soldiers heading the other way.

But before he had any longer to contemplate his stupidity, the sergeant brought him back to the present with the tyrannical statement, "You are a bothersome Confederate pig; I will enjoy seeing you hang."



Video Review - The Cure's "Just Like Heaven"

by Rosanne Scott

Ah, the Cure. How we love them so. Now this video is an old one, admittedly, but just because it's old doesn't mean that it can't be good. It's off their album Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Kiss Me. The video starts with all five of the band members on a cliff. Robert, looking great as usual in a black shirt, black jeans, high-tops and giant hair, is playing his guitar. When the vocals start he dances around in a cute way, using some very "Robert" gestures. The video is simple, but set on a cliff overlooking the ocean. This says a lot for director, Tim Popes. He knows that with some songs simple = beautiful. The sky darkens to blue and stars come out. Robert is seen through soft focus, dancing in the arms of a beautiful, theatrical woman in a white dress. This is Robert's wife. Now, as they twirl round and round twice, you might notice that the sequence is the same. If you watch carefully you will see that poor Robert breaks his ankle! The rest of the video, Robert does not stand up, ever. The video cuts from Robert on the ground to a shot of waves breaking on the rocks of a cliff. Then it cuts back to a shot of Robert on his knees, looking sleepy. Then he crawls to the edge of the cliff and looks over as the music fades.

This video is a tough one to catch--you might find it on Alternative Nation, 120 Minutes or on late at night. However, it's one of the better ones I've seen. Look for it!

The Window

by Becky Munsell

The dream in which I walked that night was the cause of my collapse. That horrible dream. It was so real, so utterly perfect that at first I had no idea it was a dream. But then I realized the light was wrong. Well, almost wrong, more like surreal.

I was walking on a hillside of dry, golden grass. It was waist high and as I waded through it toward the summit of the hill, my eyes were drawn to the sky.

At first the surreality of what I saw dazed me to where I almost passed from the dream. But I clung, trying to comprehend what exactly I was seeing.

Initially I thought the sky was merely golden, an amber shade bordering on copper. But the sky swayed and swirled as the wind gusted. I was looking into a landscape identical to the one in which I was standing.

And in that landscape, existing in that separate, but parallel reality, I saw another me.

My other looked up and our eyes locked. I was suddenly lost in a tangle of identity, no longer sure which me I was--if either.

This is when I swooned, if that is what you would call it. Swooning is something you do when awake and come close to passing into sleep. I was asleep and I came very close to passing into wakefulness. I almost awoke, but I fought for the dream and I won. But this time the sky was just a sky, not a parallel reality in which another me existed.

I let the dream go, it was no longer important, and I awoke. It was three in the morning, I saw as I glanced fuzzily at the clock. But the dream faded, reclaimed by my subconscious, as I sank back toward sleep.

There were no dreams the rest of the night, or at all, as far as my consciousness was concerned. None of the confusing duality remained, and I could remember nothing of the dream as I rose from my bed.

I fell quickly into my regular morning routine. Everything appeared the same, but I had a nagging feeling that everything had changed.

I readied myself for work and I left the house. As the golden dawn washed over the world, I had the uncanny feeling that everything was perfect and right for the first time.

I went about my day as I would any other, but as the morning faded into afternoon the feeling of rightness faded. I was enveloped in the feeling called *déjà vu*, that awful experience of knowing you have done something before.

I felt as if everything I was doing was a repeat. I would walk down the street and suddenly see a misty image of myself already at my destination. At one point in the day I was sure I'd already processed a file on the computer. I knew the name of the file and its complete contents, but when I opened it, it was unchanged.

The day progressed and when finally I walked in my front door, I found the TV on and half of the dinner I had planned already prepared. I was living alone at the time.

I screamed, tears running down my face. The TV clicked off and the semi-prepared dinner vanished. I was alone in my empty house, which was exactly the way I left it.

Shakily I decided not to make dinner, or to watch the news, but to go straight to bed. I started towards the stairs which led to my bedroom and suddenly found myself in the kitchen and the TV on.

I glanced toward the stairs and saw a dazed image of myself, looking around in terror. It looked at me and our eyes locked. I relived the climax of my dream then, the disorienting feeling of being both and yet neither.

But this was no dream. I was positive that I was insane then. That it was not possible for there to be “me’s”. Whatever this other was, though, it was going to die, my fevered mind declared.

The thought seemed totally alien in my head, and I heard an echo of it that sounded so right, I couldn’t comprehend where it was coming from.

I only knew that the alien thought must die, instead of the alien me. And since the wrong thought had originated from my own head, I grabbed up a knife and almost slit my own throat.

The other cried out, causing me to drop the knife on my foot. I severed two toes (I was inexplicably barefoot) and blood began to spurt from the wounds. The pain was like a bright white light that threatened to split my head in half. I passed out and when I awoke I was sprawled on the stairs, my shoes on and my feet apparently intact. I stood up slowly and moved into the kitchen. On the floor was a pool of fresh blood and two severed toes.

Looking at this I burst into fresh tears of joy. This was material proof that I was not crazy, that there was some other me. But as I watched the toes and the blood seemed to thin, to become wraith-like, until they were no longer there.

Standing, I rushed from my house, intent on stopping this feeling of unreality any way I could. Dashing down the street, I selected the largest on-coming car and threw myself in front of it.

I awoke in the hospital, disappointed and infuriated that they had not let me die. I just wanted peace. But that did not seem possible.

The doctors assure me that I’ll be okay, that I’m still in shock from the accident. But none of them have a window in their head that looks into another reality, where another me is resting comfortably in another Sunny Vale Psychiatric Institute.

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Chapter II: Solitude

by Teresa Vessels

He still hasn’t spoken to me. This silence is almost unbearable. When we talked before he said he had a sister. He also thought he would need me. I wonder what she looks like. I’ll bet she’s pretty, with blue eyes and long black hair. Now that I think about it, Aaron and I could be sibs. People would actually believe that... No, I have black eyes, not blue. It was a nice thought. What could he possibly need me for? And what does he do for the King? A servant could mean anything.

“Aaron, what does your sister look like? Where is she?”

“She... She’s beautiful from what my friends tell me, I never paid that much attention to my sister’s looks. She lives with our mother,” Aaron replied irritably. “What does it matter to you?”

“Aaron, I didn’t mean it that way. I just wanted to start a conversation, that’s all. I thought it was a good place to start.”

“Well, it wasn’t. I’m sorry, I haven’t seen her for a long time.”

“What do you do for the King? I have always wanted to go to the King’s Palace. Do you think I would be able to work in the kitchen or laundry? I will need a way to earn a living,” Corali babbled.

“As I said before, I am the King’s servant. What I do is bring him important information that could be vital to this kingdom’s welfare. I am quite positive you will be able to work in his household. I will speak to him about it when we arrive,” Aaron commented a bit more congenially.

“Where are we? I haven’t been out of Bend’s Crossing since I was a babe. How long until we get there?” Curiosity overwhelmed her good common sense.



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She is so much like me and yet so young. Look at her face, she is smart and beautiful. I'll bet no one has ever told her that. "Right now we are on the North Trade Road. It leads directly to the Great City. Tonight we will stay at the Broken Arrow Inn in Hastings. We should be there a few hours before dusk. I believe they are having a fair to celebrate the year's good harvests. It is almost midsummer, all the more reason to celebrate. The Great City is, at this pace, approximately four days away. Any more questions?" Aaron was warming up to Corali just like the sun was warming his back. He enjoyed her company.

I'm glad I brought her along.

"Actually, I have never been to a fair. My village didn't follow the Midsummer's Eve rites and feasting. Do you think we could go out and look at the booths? I have a bit of money with me. I brought it to the inn thinking you might need change or something. Really though, what do you say?" She was growing excited now. At a fair there would probably be a bard, that would mean dancing. She loved to dance, and from the looks of him, Aaron was probably an expert.

"Never been to a fair, huh? Of course you haven't. Once we arrive we can wash up and eat supper at the fair. If you see something that you want to buy, tell me. I'll do the haggling, the shopkeepers are less likely to cheat me out of a pretty penny!" She's probably not that much younger than I am. "How old are you, Corali?"

I'll be eighteen in no less than four months. A girl my age would normally be married, but..." but no one wanted a strong-willed foreign girl for a wife.

Just as I thought. She looks much younger, but with a little work she'll pass for twenty-one.

"How old are you? I advise you answer your own question. Don't you know it's not polite to ask a woman her age?" she teased, trying to cover her earlier stutter.

"Yes, I did know that it is 'impolite to ask a woman her age'. My mother always says that. As a matter of fact I am not much older than you. Twenty to be exact."

"Only twenty and I have seen so much. I am fated to a complex life when all I want is a home, some land, and a loving wife. Maybe a little solitude will do me some good. I feel better just being alone with Corali. She doesn't pry into my life. Only asks politely because she's lonely. I need her.

"Is that Hastings? It looks so big! Are you sure we'll be able to find our way around?" Corali wondered aloud.

"You really haven't been out of Bend's Crossing! You'll notice that the closer we get to the Great City the bigger the towns get. You can see, hear, and smell the fair already! It must be a real fling. Let's race to the sentry gate!" He dug his heels into the gelding's sides and set off at a full charge towards the gate. Corali had little choice in the matter since the grey had the bit in his teeth and put up chase.

At the sentry gate the guards were checking the names of merchants who were expected to be there off a roster. A guard looked up and saw Aaron and smiled. When he was done with the merchant, he walked gingerly over to where Aaron and Corali were still mounted, and greeted Aaron with a hearty thump on the thigh. Aaron returned the greeting by gripping the man's hand, laughing merrily, and saying, "Lord of Light, man! So this is where you've been. How did a lowly grunt like you get yourself this type of job?"

"Aye, boyo. Welcome to Hastings. My wife's sister lives here and Marie wanted to live near family. You know the sort of thing. With the fair, and a bard just happening to show up, we have a real revel on our hands! Where you staying?"

"Corali, this is Kordan. Kord for short. He and I have been friends since the end of the Border Wars. That was five years ago! It's been a long time. We'll be at the Broken Arrow, but we'll eat at the fair. Hope to see you there!" The two friends clasped hands once more before Corali and Aaron set off for the inn.

* * *

With their horses well-fed in the stable, and their baggage sagely hidden in their room, the two travelers set off for the fair.

"Let me know if you see something you want to look at," Aaron yelled at her over the din of the crowd. She could barely distinguish his voice from those of the haggling merchants around her. The smell of cooking food engulfed her as they passed the main food pavilion. Roasting meats, fresh baked bread and pastries, mead, ale, and foreign wine were offered everywhere. Men boasted over their flagons of ale. Women gossiped as they looked over expensive finery.

Aaron and Corali made their way through the crowd and found themselves next to a shabby booth with the most mouth-watering smell emulating from within.

"I want whatever is in there!" Corali said as she tugged on Aaron's sleeve. Let's go inside."

"The smell is heavenly. What are you cooking here, sir?" Aaron asked the cook.

"Meat pies. Won't tell ya my recipe 'cause it's a family secret. Can I get you something?" The older man took a long look at Corali and another look at Aaron and said, "Ya know what I think? I thinks ya got a good one there, boyo! Keep tight hold o' her this night. Men do bad things to pretty women when they's been doing a fair share of drinkin'."

"We'll take three meat pies." He took a good look at Corali who was hungrily awaiting the meal. "Better make that four pies and two mugs of cider. We don't need any wine."

The cook brought out four steaming pies still bubbling from the oven and sent his wife out with the two mugs of cider. Unable to eat the pies yet, they walked towards the center of the fair. Right in the middle they found a dancing platform, stage and lots of empty tables. Seating themselves at a table near the edge of the dance floor and close to the stage, they began to eat their supper. The pies proved to be as tasty as they smelled. Feeling full and content, Aaron and Corali began to look at the booths surrounding the dance platform. Leather work, pottery, metalsmith, and jewelry lined the square. There was only one fabric booth and it appeared to be very expensive. While in the leather works shop, Aaron found himself a new belt pouch and bought Corali one, too. Corali wanted to go to the jeweler's booth to find herself something pretty to wear when she met the King. To her disappointment everything in the booth was too expensive.

"He won't haggle with me Corali. I'm sorry," Aaron explained.

"I guess I'm really not the sort of girl who wears rings anyway. Thank-you for trying though."

"Corali, the crowd is beginning to gather. The bard must be getting ready to play. I'll go get us a few more pies, if you'll get us some more cider from the vendor over there and grab us seats."

"Sounds good to me. Hurry though, I don't want to miss anything," Corali called over her shoulder as she trotted towards the vendor.

As the bard and some of the village musicians began to play, villagers started dancing. Aaron returned with the pies, and they sat and ate watching the dancers. Giddy with excitement, they swirled and danced long into the night. Aaron's grace proved true and they only stopped momentarily to refresh themselves with more cider.

In the early hours of the morning while the villagers began to stumble home, Aaron swept Corali off her feet in one effortless motion and carried her back to the inn.

To Be Continued...

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Monologue: To School

by Cerrah Seal

Kids, plants, life and death. Everything you ever wanted to know about your septic tank and more. Simple nonsense for the people here who I seek to entertain with my charade of nonsense. Most of this entire school is sitting here before me, anxiously awaiting what I have to say. But to tell you the truth I don't really know what I am going to say. I don't know if I am here to make you cheer or chant or yell or scream or stop and think or maybe cry. To realize that our life is wasted; to make you think or know or whatever, that you aren't in hell? I do not know if I am a powerful speaker. I don't know if I can make you look at me and realize that you are being entertained.

A candle lit can make people think they're in a séance. What if I told you that you're dreaming? What if? Are you here because you want to be? Not in this auditorium, but in this school? Did you ever have a dream that you were in the school naked? Did you ever picture yourself naked on the playground, hiding behind the tether ball? Hoping that no one notices? And does the dream end when you realize that no one cares or they're all naked too? Did you ever wonder why you never seem to see the whole picture when you are dreaming?

Do you see the whole picture now? Are you dreaming? Is this hell or heaven? Is this entire thing going to end when the fat guy on stage walks off and you realize that it is over? Or will he bring you to an emotional state of chaos or fear? Wait, is this the dream where you are falling again? Are you going to hit the bottom when my monologue is over? Will you awake in a giant frenzy of a terrified scream? Will the dream realm tremble and falter as you wake up and realize you were dreaming?

Are you falling now? Are you falling out? Is this the giant radiation shelter of the mind? Is everything seeming to dissipate as you progress? Do the edges seem blurry?

A moment of silence for the ones who don't see the blurry lines.

Do you hear the near silence? Is there no one trembling in an emotional state?

Do you hate this school; do you hate being here? Do you hate rhetorical questions? The ones no one seems to want you to answer? Or the ones best left unanswered? Did you ever want to release everything within you and run through the halls yelling fuck and shit and all the vulgar things you always heard and your parents told you not to use that kind of language?

Say it now. Say fuck or shit. If you don't do it now, will you ever? Do it in your mind just once.

Did you ever wonder what spam was made of? What the hell is spam? What does the word spam mean? Is it some variant of ham? What is the sp for? Is it an acronym? Is it some clue from some far-off race of humans? Is it meant to be said backwards? Does it really mean maps? Is that why it tastes like some by-product of a pulp plant?

SPAM.

Wouldn't it be nice if it were used instead of all the vulgar things we aren't supposed to say in school? I can hear all the little Catholic school children saying to their teachers in the near future, "Spam off!"

Wouldn't you like to cry?

Would you like to cry because if you look at everything from a different perspective, aren't we the equivalent to mold on a bit of dust revolving around a yellow dot in a fluid sea of millions of dots just like it?

Stop and think everyone. Stop and think about the things best left un-thought about. Think about the people in your life. Think about this caste system in the schools where everyone seems to be striving for the top notch. Everyone may want to be popular. Everyone wants to be liked by all. Everyone wants to be the only king of the hill that doesn't have people trying to tear them down off their post. Is anyone there?

Do you wish it would snow? Do you remember times in your distant past where you were a small child playing in the snow? Sledding or learning to make a snowman? Do you remember the proud feeling you might have felt when you took a snowball in the face and didn't even cry? But do you also remember the time when all the mean big kids were there and they chased after you until you fell and hurt your finger and they put snow in your shirt and left you there? Did you try to stand and keep from crying? Did you stifle no tears as you felt your red skin tingle with the eerie pain of frostbite? You felt the snow running down your belly and you knew that you were getting colder as the first tear began to fall and you turned to go home and a boy you knew from your music class said, "Look, the little baby is crying!" And you turned around with a face that was surely as red as your frostbitten underside and you said in a voice that tried not to cry, "It's snow." And the tears began to flow and your eyelids crumpled over into your already blurry vision. You turned and ran for mommy.

The next day you see the little boy and he didn't tease you. And only now you realize that's probably because the big kids got him too.

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Letter to the Editor

When I was very young I was afraid of the dark. At night, in bed, I believed I had to stay underneath my covers or the monsters that hid in the dark would get me. But I grew out of this and conquered my fear of the dark.

When I was a teenager I was afraid I would not find friends who deserved my loyalty. They always seemed to fall away when I needed them the most. I soon learned not to expect as much from my friends as I was willing to give. Friendships were easier after that.

When I first fell in love I was afraid I might get hurt. I had seen so many broken hearts and divorces in seemingly perfect marriages. But I was in love and decided to follow my heart.

When I had my first child I was afraid I would never be able to care for this small person who would be needing so much. I experienced many successes along with my failures and now that he is nearly 18, I can see that somehow, I got him through.



When I was divorced I was afraid I could never stand on my own; never find my way through this jungle of a world to learn a new way of life. But I did and can even say I am much happier learning that I can take care of myself.

When I heard about the OCA I was afraid of what they were trying to do to our world. How much power can they use to stir up problems that exist only in their own, paranoid minds? Always, for me, I saw light at the end of scary tunnels, but I do not see any now. How will my children's children deal with this new monster lurking in the darkness of the OCA's fanatic mind? When will the OCA grow up and see there are no monsters in the shadows of this darkness they've made? Their "monsters" are only people, living their lives, enjoying their world and looking for lights at the end of their own tunnels - lights the OCA is trying to extinguish.

Marti Grissom
Cottage Grove Business Owner
and Concerned Citizen

London: Fact or Fiction

All people believe that there is a city in England named London. They've seen pictures of it and seen it on maps. I dislike calling people liars, but they are all wrong! There is no London. It never existed. If a geographical error of this magnitude can be made, how do we know Africa is really there? It is, of course, but that is beside the point. Have you ever been to London? I thought not. That's because it's not there!

I have actual proof that London doesn't exist. One of my sister's friend's acquaintances told me about how his brother's wife's uncle's ex-roommate found an ancient manuscript written in ancient English, which this person knew from having been in ancient England, but that's another story, and he translated it to modern English. It was signed by an illiterate monk and said that 10,000 years ago, aliens landed on Earth and set an alien machine where London is said to be. They then departed. The alien machine affected people so that when they got close to it, it made them believe that they were in a city, but actually they were just wandering around the countryside.

More proof, I have. If you look at a map of the world written in Swahili at midnight on the night of a full moon on a day that doesn't end in y, the city called London disappears from the map. Coincidence? I think not. The aliens felt remorse for leading mankind on for a hundred centuries, so they set it up that way, so if a smart human (of which there are none; Einstein had his dog write his equations for him, but that's beside the point) thought about it, he could figure out that there is no London, never has been a London, and never will be a London.

By now you're asking yourself, "What about the pictures? I've seen pictures of London." Well, that is another reason people think London exists. Cameras are actually sentient beings that can read your thoughts. So when you're in range of the alien machine, and the camera (which actually prefers to be called a Sh'n) reads your thoughts, and begins to believe that it's in London, and it picks up the scene from your mind and records that into pictures.

A final piece of evidence I have is my own testimony. A year ago, I was strolling through the woods near my house in search of elves, and a giant flying saucer beamed me aboard. Aliens wanted a human to know their history, so they filled my mind with information for 10,000,000,000 years (I stayed alive due to an alien elixir for fresh breath and longevity), while we roamed the universe. They told me they were the ones that had set the machine on Earth that made people believe in London (they were also the ones that turned Hong Kong into an intergalactic bar and grill). We entered a time warp and they dropped me off five minutes after I left with them. If you don't believe me, well that's too bad.

It's true this may be hard to follow, but that's because you've mistakenly spent all of your life believing in a fictional city. So to all of you yokels out there, London does not exist!! My work here is done. I must go. I have places to go, people to see, and pigs to slop.

Fini

When Men Go Buggy

A Story About The Life And Times Of Jimmy, The Smelly Little Insect, An Insect Of Such Significance That Not Only Does He Have A Whole Book Written About Him, But His Mere Journeys Through Space And Time Effect Nearly Everything That Has, Will, Or Is Going To Happen. I Mean, We Could Just Put Everything That His Life Effects Right Here In The Title, But Then You Wouldn't Read The Story, And We Can't Have That Now Can We? We Thought Not. <Author Is Slapped Violently With A Wet Carp>

by Austin Rich

Once upon a time there was a smelly little insect named Jimmy. Jimmy wasn't actually his name, nor did he have the intelligence to comprehend the concept of names, but to avoid having to refer to this smelly little insect as a smelly little insect, we will call it Jimmy.

Jimmy had a problem. His problem was quite simple to us, unless you just happen to be a smelly little insect too. His problem was as follows: Jimmy was immortal. Now, that was all fine and dandy to him, but he had a quest to carry out that his immortality enabled him to do. He was to figure out why he was incapable of the comprehension of the concept of names. Now, this is great if you want to spend the rest of forever finding out why you can't understand the idea of a name, but Jimmy didn't want to spend the rest of forever finding out why he couldn't understand the idea of a name. He wanted to know why, as far back as he could remember, people have called him a smelly little insect. But, since he already had a "job" to do, he couldn't just ignore it and move on to something else. That's just not kosher. It's like an unwritten law.

So, Jimmy had to spend the rest of forever trying to figure out why he couldn't understand the concept of a name.

This story would probably have ended right here, but Jimmy was a *persistent* smelly little insect, not just a smelly little insect, and he was bound and determined to find out why the heck people kept on calling him a smelly little insect. So he devised a plan.

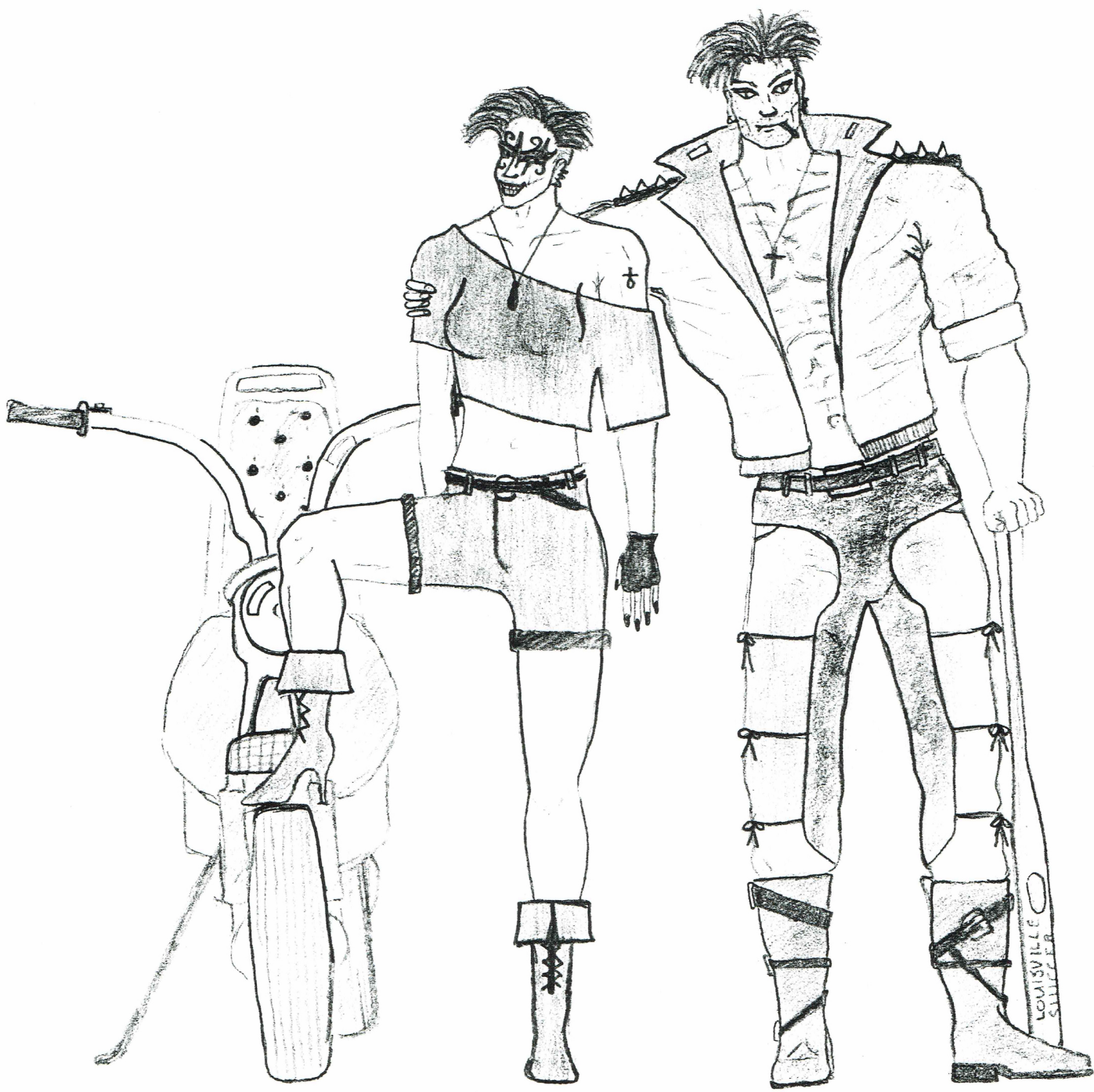
(It must now be stated that among the insect community, plans are rarely needed, and the entire fact that Jimmy was able to come up with one is more than enough for another story entirely. But, we won't get into that.)

Jimmy's plan was, as most insect plans are, really quite basic. One day Jimmy said, "Why the hell can't I just do both at the same time?" and after much thought he decided that this was a very valid point. However, he later thought something even better. "If I could hurry up and figure out why I can't understand the concept of a name, then I would have the rest of eternity to figure out why everyone keeps calling me a smelly little insect." Jimmy was so happy with this idea he went and got himself completely drunk that evening and sang back-up for a thrash band called Burnt-Out, Acid-Brain, Fluorescent Light Bulb Fixtures and Friends, with their only hit, "If I Could Be Like That Smelly Little Insect I Saw One Day On Earth." The band actually did fairly well with Jimmy backing them up, and sprang into the limelight overnight (but that's of no real importance in the grand scheme of things).

So, afterward, Jimmy devoted all his time and energy into the discovery of why he can't figure out the concept of a name. With his band status helping him, Jimmy became quite a famous little insect (smelly and persistent too) on most major planets in the universe, to the point where some people actually wanted to finance his project. Delegates from over two hundred worlds, universes, alternate dimensions, higher (and lower) planes of existence came to chat with Jimmy to try to help him with his problem. He became so famous, a large statue in his honor was erected by the Microns to show their support for him (unfortunately, they are only a micron tall as adults, and their idea of large is about one millimeter). So much money was donated to his cause he was able to build a mobile, moon-sized research station to explore the entire fabric of reality in search of the solution to his problem. (However, this didn't go over too well because it was often mistaken for the Death Star, and was blown up on numerous occasions by a band of rebel forces. Subsequently, Jimmy had to rebuild it many times, and though it wasn't too much of a loss, it was still damn annoying.)

Jimmy was, at that time, the most well-known smelly little insect in the entire universe.

But this didn't seem to help Jimmy much, because no one anywhere knew why he couldn't understand the concept of a name. Jimmy almost gave up his cause, but he made a very vital discovery one day while on Earth1. He came across a manuscript in a library. The manuscript was of no importance to him whatsoever, but the guy that ran the library knew that the monk that wrote the manuscript once knew another monk that at one time wrote a letter to the first monk saying that he knew why an insect that is very famous could not understand the concept of



ECSTASY

WOLFGANG

The lead singer blinked, and shrugged it off. About thirty seconds later, he said, “Hey, guys. Come here. I got this awesome idea for a song. How does, ‘If I Could Be Like That Smelly Little Insect I Saw On Earth,’ strike you?”

A round of, “Hey, that’s bitchin,” came from the other band members, and they got to work immediately.

Coincidence number two:

A boy about fifteen reads a book in the very distant future about a smelly insect named Jimmy, who was immortal (In fact, the book was titled The Book of Jimmy). The boy begins to think to himself about insects, and wondered what life would be like if insects were immortal and not just a made up story in a book. At that exact moment, a god was traveling to the very distant past, and overheard the boy’s thought slightly out of context. After the god comprehended what the boy had thought, he began to wonder himself. “Hey, that’s a nifty idea,” he thought. He then began to work out the plans necessary to do just that.

The End (or is it?)

1 As in, the planet in the Sol system, not the soil.

2 Strangely enough, I did not write this part. It was in the original text, which lends proof to the theory that there are more texts about Jimmy, and if that is the case, then you can count on a sequel to this which **I** will be able to sell for millions of dollars at a date later in the future when my income is not what it is now, and when the moral qualms of translating a sequel to an already complete text can be overlooked.

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Baxter

by Becky Munsell

“Are you a gambling man, Mr. Baxter?”

The words echoed disembodiedly across the desolate plain as a tall man in a gray suit looked around in confusion. “Who said that?” the man called and then flinched as the words rebounded loudly.

“Are you a gambling man, Mr. Baxter?” the words sounded again, the speaker unresponsive to the man’s question.

The man in the gray suit turned around, eyes searching for the source of the voice. The plain was a desolate black, nothing having depth. The horizon was simply a silhouette cut out of black construction paper and pasted to a purple-pink sky.

“Are you a gambling man, Mr. Baxter?” the voice asked once more, this time having a definable source. A heavily robed figure appeared in front of Baxter. The black cloak blended effortlessly into the blackness of the plain.

“Who are you?” Mr. Baxter asked apprehensively, eyes narrowing. To Baxter the plain was familiar and comforting, but its resident, while equally familiar, filled him with dread.

The robed figure looked at the gray suit critically and said, “You’ve dressed better Scott. May I call you Scott?”

Baxter nodded slowly but resubmitted his question. “Who are you?”

“You know me,” the robed man smiled. “In fact we’ve met many times. But sadly, this is the last time we will converse... unless of course you are a gambling man.”

“What are you talking about?” Baxter insisted, becoming exasperated.

“You know,” the robed man sighed, “you may not remember but if you looked into your most ancient soul you would see.”

Baxter rolled his eyes and started to turn away, but froze. “Death,” he whispered.

“Scott!” the robed man cried. “You do know me!”

Baxter turned around. “I’ve been here before,” he stated flatly.

“Of course you have, old friend,” Death smiled. “This is the Land of Nothing. It’s sort of a transdimensional gateway between lives. And between your last life and the after.”

“So why am I not moving on to the next life?” Baxter asked.

“There is no more,” Death said sadly, “Unless of course, you’re a gambling man?”

“Why do you keep asking me that?” Baxter cried tiredly. “And what do you mean ‘no more?’”

“This is it. Scott William Baxter was your last life, you’re ready for the next dimension,” Death grinned, “Unless of course...”

“Yes, yes,” Baxter interrupted, “Unless I’m a gambling man. But what do you mean?”

“Here’s the deal, Scott,” Death began. “I like you. I’ve always enjoyed your company between assignments, and your lives have always been a kick to watch. You’ve always been up for a nice wager, and you’ve almost always won. The reason I’m keeping you here in the Land of Nothing is because I want to give you a chance to place one last bet.”

Baxter eyed Death consideringly, thinking of the uncanny luck he’s always possessed. “Keep talking,” Baxter prompted.

“Excellent,” Death exclaimed delightedly. He produced a deck of cards from one of the folds in his robe. Settling to the ground, he began to shuffle them, his fingers dancing. He finished quickly and set the deck before Baxter. “Cut the deck,” Death ordered. “High card wins.”

Baxter cut the deck and looked at his card. “Ace of Spades,” he grinned.

Death raised one eyebrow and smiled. “You see, you’ve always been luckier than any man has a right to be.”

Baxter shrugged modestly and ran his fingers through his hair nervously. “What’s the new bet?” he asked eagerly.

“Ah,” Death said, “So the man is interested?”

Baxter nodded. “What is the bet?” he asked again.

“Here’s the stakes: I give you one more life,” Death began seriously, “You have to do a task of some kind. If you complete it you get to be immortal. You’d be like my assistant.”

“What happens if I don’t complete the task?” Baxter inquired.

“You don’t get any more lives, and you don’t get to move on to the next dimension. You stay here in the Land of Nothing,” Death explained.

“What’s the difference between that and being your assistant?” Baxter asked carefully.

“Being my assistant would be almost like being a god!” Death cried grandly. “You would be able to decide when and how people die, where someone’s next life would be, and if you thought someone had it too easy, you can assume a human form and mess up their life a little.”

Baxter seemed to consider this a moment and then looked sharply at Death. “What would my task be?”

“Something difficult,” Death sniffed, “But also something which relies heavily on luck.”

“Something specific please?” Baxter insisted.

“Scott!” Death said petulantly, “You sound as if you doubt my integrity. I wouldn’t cheat you. You’re my friend, my buddy, my pal, my compadre...”

“Enough,” Baxter interrupted. “Either give me a complete description of the task or the bet is off. I’ll go on to the next dimension like everybody else.”

“That’s the kicker, Scott,” Death grinned, “It’s either my bet or the void.”

“What about what’s after?” Baxter asked quietly.

“The void is what’s after. Just a big black hole. Nothingness. We don’t explain this to most people,” Death shrugged. “When we talk about the next dimension they picture a utopian realm of peace and love and eternal happiness. Imagine their surprise,” he added dryly.

“So you can see, my friend, it’s either my bet or eternal nothingness. Eternal is forever. Your choice,” Death concluded diffidently.

“What do you get out of all this?” Baxter questioned warily.

“If you lose I get to watch you go slowly insane with utter boredom. If you win I get company. Either way I’ll be happy, so there’s no reason for me to cheat you,” Death finished.

Baxter looked at the deck of cards before him and picked up the top one. Ace of Hearts. Sighing he looked up and asked tiredly, “What do I have to do?”

Death beamed and nodded. “You have to elude me for the first thirty years of your life,” he laughed.

“No, wait. What do you...” Baxter began but was cut off as he blinked from the Land of Nothing.

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Stephen Johnson had always been accident prone. When he was six months old his mother had let him lie on the floor of the living room to try the first fundamental steps toward learning to crawl. Stephen's father had owned a large boa constrictor whose cage did not always close properly. It was a narrow rescue.

At the age of one and a half, Stephen took a header down a flight of stairs as he took his first tottering steps. When he was four he nearly choked to death at the dinner table.

Major accidents were intermixed with a multitude of scraped knees, bloody noses, sprained wrists and other lesser injuries. Even as an adult he was constantly visiting the emergency room. Most people who knew him thought he was one of the luckiest men around, not because of his constant pain or his immense medical bills (or his uncanny knack for gambling) but because he was still alive. Stephen William Johnson was a resilient human, and incredibly quick healer; that was what kept him alive. For as accident prone as Stephen was he never tried to avert danger. He went mountain climbing and hang gliding, bungee-jumping and sky diving. So, it was no surprise when, at the age of twenty nine, he wound up in a coma, a week before his thirtieth birthday.

Stephen, age twenty-nine and more than a half, was not expected to live through the week. He had been skiing (one of his less dangerous pastimes) and there had been an accident. He was skiing along just fine, when some hot shot wearing all black had blind-sided him. Stephen was thrown into a somersaulting tumble down the slope, stopping when his head hit a large hoary pine.

Now Stephen William Johnson was lying in a hospital bed, with a steel plate in his head and plastic tubes down his throat.

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"Scott," a soft whispery voice hissed through the layers of darkness that blanketed Stephen. "Scott." Stephen stirred and opened his eyes and found himself looking into a sky that was the color of a bad bruise. "Scott," the voice hissed again, this time more insistent, "over here."

Stephen sat up dazedly and looked around. His eyes fell upon the owner of the eerie voice. It was a man wrapped in a black cloak that was nearly indistinguishable from the ground.

"I win," the man grinned. "I win and you lose. You lose, you lose, you lose!"

Stephen blinked at the black-robed man and looked around again. "Where am I?" he asked.

"You know this place," the other man prodded. "You know Scott. You **know**."

Stephen looked blankly at him and asked, "Who's Scott? And no, I don't know where I am."

"Oh, well then, let me refresh your memory," the robed man grinned as he stepped closer to Stephen and grabbed his head by both ears. Stephen struggled minimally and then relaxed, staring into the robed man's eyes.

A shudder ran along Stephen's body and his eyes rolled back into his head, showing only the whites. Stephen's mouth opened convulsively and he shrieked in excruciating pain. The robed man let go of Stephen's ears, letting his limp body fall to the ground.

Stephen looked up after a moment and hissed contemptuously, "Death."

Death grinned, bowed theatrically, and then made a disapproving sound. "Such anger," Death commented, "Such hate, such pain. What's wrong dear Scotty? Regretting the bet?"

"I haven't lost yet," said Stephen Johnson (who was once Baxter, and was now again).

"You are here," Death sniffed, looking around, gesturing vaguely. "I win."

"I'm not dead," Baxter insisted.

Death snorted and said, "Then why are you here?"

"Don't play stupid," Baxter grinned. "I'm in a coma. Alive. You're trying to get me to give up. You're afraid you're going to lose."

Death eyed Baxter uneasily and shook his head. "You're losing Scott," Death smiled, "Face it. This is your home now. And your sanity is mine. Lock, stock, and barrel."

"Wrong," Baxter said. "You made a fatal mistake. When you showed me my memories, you showed me your secrets. I'm leaving."

Baxter turned away and transcended the layers of coma into sleep until he came into full wakefulness.

Baxter opened his eyes, wondering where he was. But then he remembered he had just come from a coma so he realized he was most likely in a hospital. He pressed a call button next to his bed, which brought a nurse running. "Mr. Johnson!" she exclaimed, staring in shock at Baxter.

"It's okay," Baxter croaked, "but I need a drink of water."

He smiled at her and she cringed. Both of Baxter's eyes were very blackened and practically swollen shut. But she nodded and went for the water.

When she reappeared she had a doctor in tow. He looked unhappy and sleepy. Baxter attributed this to the fact that the clock on the wall said it was three in the morning.

The doctor looked down on Baxter, his black, dull eyes, shining flatly with lifelessness. Baxter croaked softly and struggled weakly against the heaviness in his limbs.

"Never make bets with Death, my friend," the doctor hissed. "If there's one thing you can't avoid--no matter how lucky you are--its me."

The doctor grinned evilly and his white coat melted away to reveal layers of black robes. Baxter's last living experience before he was sentenced to eternal insanity, was the feeling of Death's ice-cold hands close around his neck.

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Author's note: The following are fictional tributes to four very important people in my life.

A Sequence of Dreams

by Melissa Cooper

A Dream

A road--hot, hard pavement spread out across the desert. Not a pretty desert, not the stuff of paradise--just barren, desolate. He is in the road--lost, alone. He shuffles along, no shoes, just socks, dressed for bed. I call to him--in greeting, in query. No sound. Nothing, save the wind--low, constant, subliminal. A blazing yellow sky--hot sun, yet it is cold. He does not see me; I am not there. I see all there is--not much.

A stampede. He is in the road. People--coming. They are all the same, different hair, different names--all the same. They run--fast--they run--hard. He is in the road. They try to run him over--on foot. He throws his hands before his face. They trample him. "No, no, no, no..." They can't hear me; he can't hear me. I scream, "Stop!" They continue--unhearing. He is in pain, on the outside. I am in pain, on the inside.

They leave. I run to him. He is crying, crying. He cries. I try. I do. I did. I tried. I hold him. I am crying. The tears burn his flesh--I cry. Please. Please. Why does he hurt? Why does he cry? The sky opens.

Light

--harsh. He is gone from my arms.

I cry. I cry.

"No, no, no..."

I wake. I wake.

A Dream Again

The leaves fall--down, down, down. She sits upon a stone. A spider web--in her hair. Sunlight on her face--darkness in her eyes. The trees surround--a forest--complete the circle, complete the barrier. I stand on the edge. The forest beckons me--she too calls to me. I do not know--I know not what to do.

Her touch is firm, her mind is sharp. Quick and cunning--a precision mind. The human side is far from casual reach, and yet I have found it. I have found the human touch, embraced it, loved it, and felt it fall away.

The forest pulls at me--such a strong force. Why can I not live in both worlds--the forest and the circle? She calls to me; her voice is forceful, yet pleading.

The forest's pull is strong. I am pulled to it. I am helpless. I am in the forest's grasp. I do not resent it.

She cries out in anguish--in anger. Her pull is not strong enough. Her pull has weakened in the struggle. I am hovering in limbo. The forest and she, pull equally.

I am torn. I am lost, in the pull. I am lost and torn and pulled again. The forest. The circle. The forest. The circle. I am lost. Lost. Help me. Help me.

I wake.

I am lost.

A Dream, A Dream, A Dream

He calls out. Maybe not to me, but he calls. I answer. We are the heart of a storm, each our own storm. The storms collide--we are joined. Through tumbling seas and false calms, we battle on. We might glimpse the clear blue sky, and ride the crest for a while, but we are forever thrown into the trough.

We battle the waves, as we will again. We survive. I heard his call--I can't go back. The dry, calm land will never be the same. I hear voices, calling out to me. The voices--some weak, some strong--they can never pull me back. Not all the way. After riding the storm, nothing is the same.

The Final Dream

A voice, clear and calm--from my head and all around--it surrounds me. There is no denying the strength of the voice. It conquers all. Forever, it seems--the voice rules.

The voice grows arms that hold me, a body to shelter me. The goodness of the voice, it molds me, it shapes me--into what, only time can tell. There is little the voice cannot teach me, little I care not to learn. The voice I hear, in these dreams, it calls out loud and clear. What is right, what is dear. The voice is the only voice I hear.

Even new voices, my own included, can never take the place of that strong and gentle voice. I am that voice--through the dreams, the voice is me. I am swelling with pride--pride at what is me, at what the voice has made me.

I shall never wake, from this dream--I hope.

"I'm an ASSHOLE"

by James W. Anderson, Jr.

42 year old man is reminiscing about high school years. How and why he changed from "THE NERD" to the biggest ASSHOLE in the school.

ASSHOLE: Some people are complete ASSHOLES. I used to be one but I've changed. It all started when I was a Freshman. You see, I was kind of a new kid in school. I was picked on a lot, everyone called me "THE NERD." The event that changed me was when I asked the head cheerleader if she'd go out with me. She dropped her books, looked me in the eyes and said, "Bbbut yyyyour 'THE NERD.'" Then she slapped me. I looked around and everyone was laughing. I was so embarrassed, I pissed my pants. I went home and vowed that, "This will be the last time anyone would ever call me 'THE NERD,'" and it was. Because I signed up for weight training, football, and track. I discovered I was pretty good at them. When I started I was 4'9" and weighed 125 lbs., but by the end of my senior year I was 6'0" and weighed 175 lbs. At first I was a loner, until one of the captains asked me if I'd like to do something with him. I of course (being "THE NERD") jumped at the chance to hang out with one of the most popular guys in the school. That's when it happened. That night I changed but not back to a nerd. This time it was to an ASSHOLE. Remember the cheerleader? Well you see, we egged her house that night, aaaaannnnndddd she saw me doing it, but I didn't know she did until later, so I started hanging out with her. At first there was a little tension, but I eventually began to loosen up. After a while I decided to ask her out again. So I did. She said, "But you're the ASSHOLE that egged my house," and she slapped me again. I looked around everyone was laughing as usual. I stood there and thought to myself,

"I'm an ASSHOLE."



I wish
by Cerrah Seal

I wish that one day all will be equal
the women and the men; No prequel no sequel
I wish that one day all will be happy
in that day all people will be ready
to earn everyone's adoration
at the same time, with no tribulation

I once heard a song in a man's heart
that was within itself a new art
completely foreign to other people
this man saw the world as equal
this man was alone in all of his feelings
but then he displayed in all dealings

I once read a poem that so expressed,
that described, the very best
to go about your daily life
in a way causing no strife
to others or yourself
an idea so totally awesome in itself
that one man spent years putting it on paper
all of his life at that point did taper
and he died.

I wish, I wish that we all were poets
I wish that all could elegantly write the notes
that do indeed change the world
I see the future: Everyone curled
into fetal little balls and died
to few there was death denied
they saw the world as it was
Composed or wrote
with all their heart and then died as everyone does

Don't you all see? We are dying
without our hearts. I am crying
in the world you are the heirs
So I'm begging you write, compose, care, wish.
Wish!!

The Deadline
by Kelly Ballance

The idea is taken and made into a plan,
like clay wielded in a two year old's hands.
The deadline is set, it will be done.
You will do it.
Practice and perfection, as near as you can be.
The day before you stand in front of your peers.
They are the silent judges.
You do not know if you can pull through.
Your stomach is light and your arms heavy.
Is this supposed to be fun?
The day is come.
You tremble.
Oh God no! Please, I take it all back!
You plead, you beg and then you're on stage.
You realize that the whole world is a violent
playground.
The voices sing loud with the chant.
So you join it and you love it.

Stand
by Kelly Ballance

Come forth
and take this thing,
as it is given unto you.
Thou shalt be merry and joyous,
for many a year,
until the stark reality hits you,
with the force of a speeding train.
Then this thing becomes a curse
and you
stand here all alone, angry and maybe the slightest bit
confused.
How did you get here?
No one knows, no one can tell you.
It was never asked.
You ask now and your questions are turned away.
You long to be free, but
Here you stand all alone and angry and still confused,
completely taken and then caged,
held out for the many hands to
reach and grasp and caress.
Here you hold out your soul and
greedily it is taken, spit out.
Here you stand all alone and empty.
Where have you gone?
Still no answers and there never will be.
And,
here you fall.

Lost
by Ron Horner

I don't know where I am
Don't know where I came
From my friends and family
I am put to shame

Sucked in through the void
I feel the pain no more
Smashed into walls
Lost and so so sore

The people laugh and smile as I spin
The pain the pain
Satan grins

Lost and never know
Just which way the tunnel goes
Being tossed two and fro
Blood and bruises I have to show
Do I exist no one knows

I wish I'd lay in a ditch
Be gone be dead
from all this shit

I wish some to care
In this world
We have to share

In this grave I dug myself
I view the world inside out
My oak wood coffin
Strong and stout

Lost and never know
Just which way the tunnel goes
Being tossed two and fro
Blood and bruises I have to show
Do I exist no one knows

Satan himself
wants me dead
Be destroyed
All in my head

Going through the void
Only living I must find
The way out
To free my mind

My master calls
I do not know
What he is
I MUST know

Lost and never know
Just which way the tunnel goes
Being tossed two and fro
Blood and bruises I have to show
Do I exist no one knows

Through the void
Being tossed two and fro
I see the light
I now must go

Race to the beauty
Rage to the light
When I enter
I need not fight
All a trick
From you to me
It's time to leave behind
All this fucking shit

Lost and never know
Just which way the tunnel goes
Being tossed two and fro
Blood and bruises I have to show
Do I exist no one knows

Lost no more
I pray to God
In my grave
Lost in fog.

He Was There.

by E. Lavios

The fear that everyone will know.
He's been there.
The look you get from every one of his friends.
They know.
He told them.
Every scream.
Everything...
Every time you told him NO!
Everything...
You'll never forget it...
You'll never forget every look, every anything!
Are they staring at you?
Did he really tell them everything?
Why are they looking at you that way?

* * *

Stop it!
Stop it now!
Stop looking at me!
I didn't do anything!
My life goes on ... I can't see you staring.
I don't believe you know.
I don't believe you know everything.
You can't know.
He wouldn't tell them...
Why would he tell them?
I only did what he told me to.
Is that wrong?
Am I wrong?
Doesn't he love me?

The abstract warm embrace

by Cerrah Seal

Your hand touches mine
our hands intertwined
through the feelings are all mine
they are not just in my mind

I know that you do feel it too
the feelings being shared
in that friendly, warm embrace
comforting because you cared

We are not lovers to the world
because we do not need to be
to share the feelings flowing soft
and see what others see

We do it still as friends
It need be nothing more
A couple of good friends
walking on the shore

Seeping

by Robb Wolfard and R. Stephen Howard

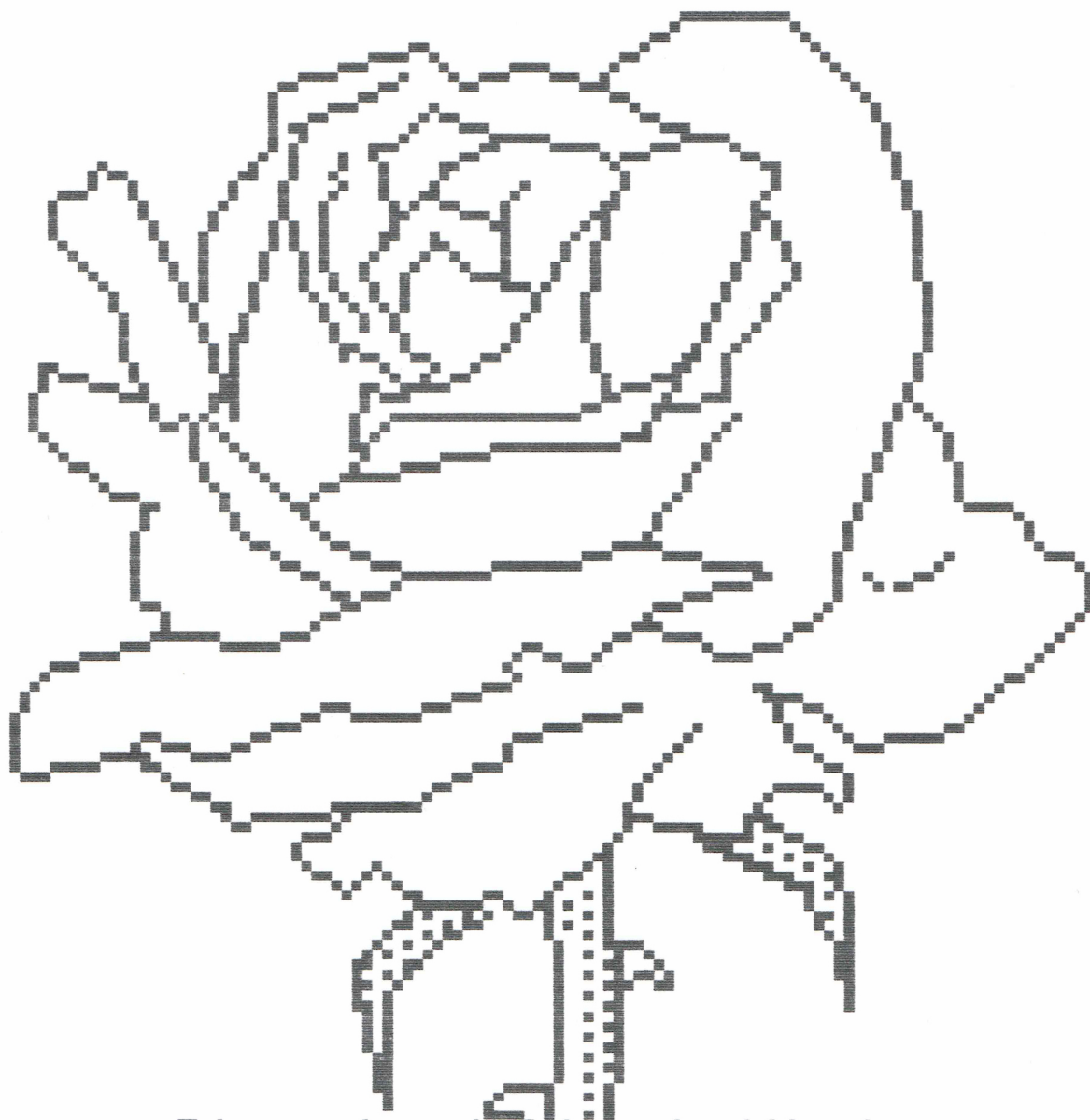
Shadows from the never-ending
Raging for today
Never wanting to know why, why you act this way.

Talons of the ever-ready
Slashing here and there
Can you stop me?
Can't you hear me?
And do you really care?

They take my hands and tie them together
They take me mind, myself and they sever
Talking to no one,
Wondering why
But they never.

Flying everywhere
The land is creeping
Crawling in the air
Through my fingers
My world is SEEPING.

The Rose



Story by Janice L. Kimbro
Illustrated by Janice L. Kimbro

The Rose

by Janice L. Kimbro

One day as I was walking along the river I saw a very beautiful flower. The flower was crying because she had no one to talk to, or to take care of her. I went up to the flower and said, "Flower do not cry, for I will take care of you and keep you company."

The flower looked up and said, "You promise to take real good care of me?" and I told her yes, I would.

I asked, "What if your name, my beautiful flower?"

She answered so softly like the wind, "My name is Rose for that is what I am."

I said, "Glad to meet you Miss Rose, for you are the most beautiful flower I have ever seen." She blushed a bright red.

I said, "How long have you been here all alone?"

She said, "For almost twelve years and it's been a lonely twelve years at that." I said, "Why don't you come home with me for I have another flower who may be even more lonelier than you."

She said, "Please, let me think about it for a day."

So I said, "That would be fine. Until next time, I will see you again."

So the long and lonely day passed by so slowly, until a sudden storm hit. I thought to myself, "*I hope that poor little flower is alright.*" I went looking for the Rose and found her, almost dead from all the rain and the coldness. I said, "Poor little Rose. Will you come with me so that I may be able to help you?"

She said, "Very well, you may take me home." So I took her home that night. When she saw how beautiful my home was she began to cry out, "Oh my, what a lovely place you have, Madame."

"Why thank you, Miss Rose. I am happy you are pleased with my home and my lovely garden. But I know who will be happier to see someone of his own kind. I will take you to my nursery where you can meet this fine gentleman for yourself." When I brought her in the room, she was so happy for she saw a lot of other beautiful flowers like herself. I said, "Miss Rose, is there something wrong?"

She said, "No, my lady, there is nothing wrong. I love this place you call a nursery. How did you manage to do this on your own?"

I said, "It took me at least 3 years before I could get it all done." She asked me what I meant by 'all done'. I said, "I raise flowers and I take care of sick children at the same time."

"Mamma, you're always busy all the time," said my little Jordan Plant (who is a rose).

I said, "Jordan, mamma is always busy make sure you are find and healthy."

"Mamma," Jordan said, "Are you alright? You look kinda sick."

"Jordan," I said, "Don't worry about me. The only reason I'm sick is because I was out in the rain. I will be feeling find in a day or two."

For the next two or three days Rose was helping me get better. I said, "Rose, why are you helping me?"

Rose said, "Because thanks to you saving my life from the storm, I am very grateful to you, so now I must help you like you did for me." The Rose said, "I must go back to where you found me." I asked her why. She said, "Because that is where I must die and then I will be able to come back and have little roses with me."

"I am sorry, my friend, but I must not let you go back there alone. I will stay with you."

"No," Rose said. "You need to stay here and take care of Jordan and the rest of the family. Please remember to come see me in the spring."

So that night I took her back to the river side and planted her in the ground and said, "Goodbye until we see each other again, my friend."

Rose said, "Mamma, I have one thing I want you to do for me if you would please."

I said, "What is that my fair beautiful flower?"

She said, "If I don't come back, please tell Jordan that I love him and that I will see him in the Spring."

"Yes, I will do that for you," I said. "See you in the SPRING."

The Adventures of Spare-O and Red Cardinal
Episode Two: The guy with the white jacket from the padded room

by Buck and Austin Rich

The school's fire alarm roars off.

"I'm awake, I'm awake," mumbled Joey as he sat up from his desk.

"That was a fire alarm Joey not an alarm clock," said Montey who was already rising to leave.

"Good, then I'll go back to sleep," mumbled Joey who was already getting comfortable again.

"Get up you idiot," said Montey. "This fire alarm not scheduled, and that means someone set it off. It's up to us to find out who did it."

Joey and Montey then went and changed into Spare-O and Red Cardinal (Trumpet sounds in the background). "To the Cardinalmobile!" shouted Red Cardinal. They then went and they, uhhhm, they went and, gee what did they do, they.....

(Then, as if out of nowhere, a man with a white jacket approached, and grabbed the pen from the author's hand.)

I know what they did. They killed everyone. Yeah, yeah, they turned into evil people and burnt down the school themselves while playing polka music. Yeah that's it. Then they fought Rambo and Commando at the same time and won because they had big guns and shot everyone. Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha, Hee Hee Hee Hee.

Hey, hey you, get away from me. Get away from me. I don't need to go back! I don't want to go back! Get out of here. Go away!! Don't put me back into that padded room. No No NO NO NO NO!!!!!!

May I have your attention please. Due to circumstances beyond our control, The Adventures of Spare-O and Red Cardinal Episode Two: The guy in the white jacket from the padded room, has, well, let's just say we have some technical difficulties (and a slight writers strike). Please tune into the next issue of Bob's Imagination to see what may really happen (we hope).

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Thieving At Night

by Meredith Carlson

The sultry night air closed in on Chloe, suffocating the light from her eyes as she tried desperately to find the lock that kept the door to the small inn secure.

Mhat, Destell and Icane, her companions, kept lookout on either side of the inn for passers-by who might accidentally witness the robbery which the four thieves had planned.

Chloe grimaced when she found the lock at the bottom of the door. "Grand," she thought, "I'm going to have to pick the lock from the inside."

Chloe made a quick clicking noise, signaling to her companions that it would be awhile before she had them in. Every thief knew that inside locks were next to impossible to get into.

She took a flat, bent rod of steel from her cloak and stuck it under the door. With a clang, the rod of steel hit something hard connected to the other side of the door. A smile made its way across her face as a merry thought trekked across her mind: The lock must be broken. Ha, ha! All I have to do is break whatever that is connected to the door.

Again, the steel rod went under the door. Chloe slammed the steel against the object connected to the door. Following, she heard a loud bang, like a glass chandelier had hit the floor.

She felt a large hand grip her arm and pull her to her feet. The hand belonged to Mhat. He tugged her along while Icane and Dastell followed them through the village toward the forest.

As they approached the forest, Chloe could hear the angry curses of the innkeeper. When she looked back, she saw that most of the village had not been awakened.

Finally, deep in the forest, Mhat allowed the group to stop. As they all panted for breath, they could hear no more noise coming from the village.

“What, in the black pit of Pan, did you do, Chloe?” Mhat asked furiously.

“Yes, Chloe, what were you trying to do? You told us you had thieving experience when you joined us?” Icanne added.

Chloe casually looked to Dastell. In the moon, the features on his face did not show anger as the other two; but rather pity.

“And what do you have to say to me, Dastell? Are you not joining these two,” she gestured to Icanne and Mhat, “in shouting at me?”

Dastell only drew a deep breath, looking from thief to thief and back again. Finally he said, “I don’t think it was her fault, Mhat. That lock was rigged; set up to alarm as soon as someone broke into it.”

Mhat heaved a sigh and shook his head, “We had better get out of here. In the morning that innkeeper will have hounds after us. We will stick to the trees; the hounds won’t track us that way. Tomorrow, we’ll rest.” With that he walked to the nearest tree and began to climb.

Chloe quickly followed him. Her favorite part of thieving with her new companions was leaping from tree to tree like imps or wood elves.

Seven days ago, Chloe joined up with the band of thieves after meeting them at an inn. The leader, Mhat, belonged to no guild. He and the other two boys thieved for survival and also for the thrill of it.

Mhat was old enough, Chloe figured, to get a job and start a family if he wanted to. But with Queen O’Brine Z’treal ruling the kingdom, Mhat always said only a fool would allow the money he earns be thrown away to support one stuck up wench.

As she aimed for the largest branch on the next tree, Chloe thought about the life she led before she met Mhat.

Her previous companions were all young men. All six of them died on a suicide mission to steal a dragon’s treasure.

That dragon’s name was Zangitan. She was not as stupid as the leader of Chloe’s group thought her to be.

Zangitan was a black-chested dragon. Therefore, she was quite intelligent and knew what to expect from the pack of thieves.

Their plan was to fool the dragon out of the cave by leading her to believe that one of her draclings had taken a plunge off of a nearby cliff attempting to fly and injured itself badly. When she was gone, Chloe would keep an eye on her while the other six filled large bags with Zangitan’s loot.

Chloe realized, as she carefully watched the dragon look for her little one, that Zangitan knew that the group of purloiners threw, not a dracling over the cliff, but a bag of seed; feebly made to look like one of her draclings.

Chloe looked toward her companions to sound alarm of the back-fire, but the sound of her voice was blocked off when she looked back, for she stared eye to eye with the fire breathing lizard. Though Zangitan could not speak, Chloe knew what the smile on the warm face was telling her, “Your companions are fools!”

Chloe did not scream, for she saw that this was her chance to be rid of the abusive boys who dragged her across the plains with them. If she tried to run away, they would find and punish her.

She had run with them all her life and all her life she was their pleasure, their bait for traps, their pillow to punch when one was not happy with life. Over the years, Chloe had come to believe there was no escape, and if there was, where would she go? What could she do? Chloe had always thought her purpose in life was to live thieving with these boys as their toy.

However, in the mere ten seconds she stared into Zangitan’s shiny red eyes, it all came to her--*I don’t need them. I will find a way. Now is my chance to pay them back for ruining my life!*

Chloe backed away slightly, making sure her companions didn’t see that their plan had miscarried on them, and smiled at Zangitan. “Go on,” she told the dragon, “I’ll keep quiet.”

Zangitan’s smile deepened and she crept quietly into the cave.

For the next five minutes, Chloe heard the roaring of fire and screaming of the young men.

After a while, Lexid, the leader, ran out of the cave with a dracling in his arms. When he saw Chloe, he yelled, “Traitor bitch!”

The dragon crawled out of the cave with rage after him. Lexid stood near the edge of the cliff, yelling, “Come any closer and the lizard’s dead meat! This is no bag of seed!”

As he threatened Zangitan, Chloe crept behind Lexid and kicked him hard in the kidney. When he fell to the ground, she took the baby dragon aside. He punched her when she faced him, but this being the thousandth time he hit her, it didn't faze her.

She pulled a knife from her cloak, grabbed his hair and slit his throat. Feeling his hot blood pour in her hands, she was satisfied with the revenge she had taken.

After saving the dragon's young, Zangitan let Chloe keep a bag filled with her fortune that one of the thieves had left behind and flew her to a nearby city.

In that city, Chloe met Mhat. He said his group was in need of a skilled lock picker. When she told him that picking locks was her main gig, he agreed to put her on trial for a few days.

Chloe met the other two thieves and fell in love with their company compared to how she felt about her previous companions.

Icane was the jester of them all. Dastell was the happy, relaxed, easy-going thief who enjoyed a good game of sticks and stumps. Mhat was the leader of them. Chloe never saw him smile. He was always concentrating on something. He rarely lost his temper with the exception of yelling at someone now and then which, according to Dastell, Mhat hardly ever apologized for his actions. "He's sorry, but he won't admit it," he said.

Chloe kept close behind him as they leapt from tree to tree. They had been going for a long time. Chloe was expecting him to stop anytime, but he didn't. He continued to swing by his arms to the next limb.

They did not stop until early dawn. When they set foot in the forest floor, Mhat commanded Icane and Dastell to gather wood for a fire.

The leader of the group slumped up against a tree, tired and worn out. "I'm sorry for yelling at you, Chloe. I know that that lock was meant to alarm," he said quietly, "I just feel terrible for not getting you three fed in the past two days, and I had to get rid of my anger."

Chloe was surprised that he went so far as to admitting his guilt. She began picking up small sticks scattered around the clearing.

"I understand how you feel," was all she managed.

She was never able to communicate very well with him. She felt clumsy whenever she was near him. He was two years older than her. Therefore, it seemed that he was smarter. Chloe was careful about what she said to him, hoping to lead him the opposite direction of thinking she was a silly child.

Mhat didn't seem to notice her silent crush on him. He kept to his own business and bothered no one, unless he was giving orders. To Chloe he seemed troubled; like he wanted someone to talk to whom he could trust. She very badly wished she was that someone, but knew he would trust her least of all his two best friends and he didn't talk to them either.

Mhat suddenly stood up and hunted the ground like a chicken hunting for bugs.

"Hey," Icane appeared with Dastell behind him, "Did you lose your mind?"

Mhat paid no attention to Icane's feeble jests. "I lost my dagger. It's not in my cloak."

"I took it to go hunting," Dastell said.

The leader of the pack slowly stood, a bit surprised. "How did you get that from me? I've had it with me all night."

"Ah," Icane laughed slapping Dastell on the back hard, "The secrets of a thief."

Dastell rolled his eyes at him and began to start a fire.

Chloe's eyes were closing by themselves.



Boy On The Curb

Chapter One

by Becky Erbes

The thick fog rolled gently through the dark, secluded part of the city. He sat on the curb huddled inside his thin, worn out rain slicker, patiently waiting for the man. The man said to meet him here at ten. It was not eleven thirty five. The dirty water in the gutter, slowly running to the drain, was a comforting song to his lonely ears. No matter if he was late tonight, his drunken father wouldn't know the difference. Any time he came in late he would just tell his father it was five. He always got away with it because his father was incoherent in only an hour after work each day. He had gotten used to it. He did what he wanted, when he wanted and didn't have to answer to anyone. His mother no longer lived with them. She took off a year ago to pursue her dream of becoming an actress. He hadn't seen her in a film yet, but he was waiting. He loved his mother. She was beautiful and talented and she always tucked him in; when she still lived at home. He hadn't seen her or heard from her since she left, but he knew that was just because she was busy. She didn't have time to... write him.

He heard the roar of the Harley thirty seconds before he saw the headlight. The man appeared around the bend on his bike dressed in black leather, and a joint hanging out the corner of his mouth. He slowed at the curb and looked accusingly at the boy. Making some kind of decision in his mind he sighed, took out his joint and said, "Get on." The boy looked around for someone who might be willing to help him get out of this mess he'd gotten himself into. There was only a sloshed bum half a block down the street, who probably couldn't get up to save his own life. Defeated, the boy got on that back of the bike and they roared off down the alley.

"How old are you?" the man asked, after two blocks.

The boy thought quickly. He was only thirteen but he thought he might be able to pass off at least sixteen. "Eighteen," he answered. Better to lie a lot and get the man thinking he was older than he really was. The man glanced back at him and smirked. "How old?"

The boy gulped and looked at the ground rushing by. It made him dizzy if he looked too long. "Fifteen," he said hoping that the man would go for that one. The man didn't respond.

After about an hour on the bike the boy had no idea where they were. "Where are we going?" he asked cautiously. The man didn't answer for so long that the boy thought he wasn't going to.

"There's a barn just outside San Marcos, that's where you'll be getting your instructions. Until then, shut up."

They arrived at their destination about two hours later. The boy had dozed off and awoke to find himself leaning against this strange man. He jerked up and swayed on the bike tipping it slightly. "Wake the hell up, Kid!" the man yelled furiously, "What are ya tryin' to do? Kill us?" The boy rubbed his eyes and saw there was a barn about 25 feet in front of them off a dirt road. There were hundreds of bikers standing around the doors and even more bikes lined up against a side wall.

"What's your name, Kid?" the man asked suddenly.

"Alex," he answered.

"I'm Joe. Get off." Alex got off the bike and took a step back, "If you need anything, tell someone to find me." He peeled out throwing gravel and disappeared around the back of the barn. Alex looked around and started to get very nervous. He walked slowly to the front door, trying to ignore the dirty stares he was receiving. There was a six foot five guy leaning against it who must have weighed at least 360 pounds. Alex swallowed hard and went up to him. The man glared down at him and moved aside only enough to allow Alex to go in the door, as soon as he stepped through, the door slammed behind him.

The only thing Alex heard in the pitch black darkness was raspy breath and a man saying, "Come in."